

CYPRUS UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY

DEPARTMENT OF MULTIMEDIA AND GRAPHIC ARTS



Thesis Project

An attempt in character design
free of sexism and stereotypes

George Pourgouris

Limassol 2017

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An attempt in character design
free of sexism and stereotypes

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Dr. Andri Ioannou

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I would like to thank my supervisor Dr. Andri Ioannou for her assistance and support throughout the process of writing and designing of my Thesis. Finally, I am thankful to Fedias Hadjixenofontos for his tremendous help and support and the guidance he provided me with, throughout the designing process of my Thesis.

Abstract

Video games have become a huge and important part in the lives of many people, they evolved from a simple form of entertainment into art and even education. And so their influence on children, teens and adults is quite big. And for that reason video games must pass on the right messages to the community, because they have the power to influence the way the player sees reality. The media in its many forms is filled with stereotypes, and video games are no exception. Video game characters are essential to a game, it is through these characters that the player interacts with the game, they are the physical manifestation of the player inside the virtual world of the game. And the stereotypes that affect video games mainly affect video game characters, more specifically sexist stereotypes. To clarify, women are mostly depicted sexualized, with as much as little clothing as possible and suggestive possess, not only that, their bodies are also over sexualized, with big breasts and thin waist lines. While men on the other hand, are always depicted as these powerful muscular figures with intimidating poses. This thesis will act as the “design” part of another thesis, the purpose of the previous thesis was to research and prove the existence of stereotypes in video games, while the purpose of this thesis is to design characters based on the guidelines set by the previous one. Also, research needs to be done on how to design characters and find good character designs from existing games and use them as guidelines. After the researching part is done, the designing of the characters will commence and when sufficient characters are created they will then be presented to experts to evaluate them, thus pointing out flaws that need correcting.

Keywords: Sexism, Stereotypes, Video Games, Character Design

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1. Introduction

The role of video games in the world has grown larger since the first video game was created. Video games are one of the largest forms of entertainment, along with movies and music. They no longer aim for a specific group of people, but instead with time, video games have changed to cater to a larger audience. As a result, they affect many more people and in a larger scale, since their production is becoming better and better.

And as in all forms of entertainment, some stereotypes are created, in the case of video games, these stereotypes affect the characters. It is important to note that video game characters act as the avatars of players inside the game, the player is the character. As a result, in order for video game characters to be attractive to the player some stereotypes are created. One of stereotypes that greatly affects video game characters is sexism. For example men are always portrayed muscular, they have a more powerful stature and they are usually young or middle aged. On the other hand, women are portrayed more sexually, they have small waists, big breasts and are shown with sexually suggestive poses, furthermore they are almost always young at age. These stereotypes affect the player in the way they see other people and themselves, but even worse these stereotypes create standards that are out of touch with reality and in no way cannot and should not be fulfilled. For example, a teenager spends countless hours interacting with a character from a video game, at some point they identify with the character, they come closer to the character, it is most likely then that they will demand from themselves and others to match the criteria of said character.

This thesis as stated before is part of another thesis. Its purpose was to research and analyse these stereotypes and set some guidelines on how to correctly create a video game character without those stereotypes. The purpose of this thesis is to research these stereotypes in a small extent, and also research the fundamentals of character design and how it's correctly done. But the most crucial part of this thesis is the design. Its main role is to act as the design part of the previous thesis, it will use the guidelines set by its predecessor and the knowledge acquired from researching character design to create several video game characters. With the creation of these characters a solution will be proposed to this problem, since these characters will be examples of good character design without stereotypes.

Some significant finding was made about video game stereotypes according to an article:

Video game characters are icons to young people and their culture, they set some standards, but research on their role in the community and how they depict sexes is rare. A study about the depiction of video game characters from a series of magazines has found that 83%

of male characters are more likely to be presented as aggressive, than female characters. While female characters are more likely to be presented more sexually in comparison to male characters (60% to 1%). Another study was conducted on a group of teenagers, it showed that these stereotypes are real and the same is believed by people that don't even play video games. (Dill, 2007).

To further understand the role of a video game character, here is the definition of character design:

“ A character is an illustration that possesses human features, so that it can depict believable roles in stories, for example: novels, children's books, video games and animated movies” (Wigan,2009).

The phenomenon of stereotypes can be found on almost all video game titles, only a small number of them try to avoid these stereotypes. As a result, these stereotypes become the norm and affect the video game audience in a huge way. Despite this, there is not much done to counter this and the research on the subject is very small. And so, this thesis will try and suggest solutions to this problem or at least raise awareness. This thesis will be divided in several parts. The first part will be the research part, researching will be done on these stereotypes, what are they and how they affect us. Later on, research will be done on character design, how it's from start to finish and basically how to correctly create a character for a video game. After the research part is over, the design part will begin. The design part is the creation of several video game characters, these characters need to be original and without stereotypes, this part is based on the research that was done prior and on the guidelines set by the previous Thesis. After the characters have been created, they will be given to experts to be evaluated, so any mistakes that may be found can be corrected. After these corrections are done, the characters will be evaluated again and then corrected again, this cycle will continue until the characters are perfected or time runs out. Finally, when the characters are truly finished the thesis will be over.

2. Research Questions:

2.1 What is good character design and how is it done without stereotypes?

For this part I will research existing literature about character design in video games and I will also research games that have humanoid characters that are portrayed in a non-stereotypical way and draw reference from them to create my own characters while simultaneously using the guidelines that are set by my predecessor. Afterwards I will create several unique characters.

2.2 Other than the non-sexist design in characters what other designs can be used and what other concepts and features can be promoted?

Creating characters that do not promote sexist stereotypes is my main objective but I would also like to take it a step further and create characters that are less likely to be seen in today's video games and draw reference from existing characters and create my own. For example, disabled people, elderly people, children and characters that may seem unusual.

3. Literature Review

3.1 Stereotypes

Studies on the portrayal of the sexes and races by the media are very important. These studies have shown that these depictions made by the media, are an important source for creating meaning in everyday life for the audience. People are constantly trying to interpret what they see on television, so that they can find meaning in their social life or their own identities. In the case of video games, the reception of media content has a specific character because of the games' interactive nature. They can change what happens in the game by some motor action via a controller, joypad, keyboard, or another kind of interface. When players stop interacting, the game falls dead. This interaction can have consequences to the player's identification with the characters inside the game. A study has shown that children identify a lot with video game characters, and this can affect the development of the child's character. More studies have shown that video games are dominated by men, which they always had "powerful" roles. The women on the other hand appeared in more submissive roles. (Jansz, 2007, pp.2).

Children Now, a community-based organization has found (as cited in Leonard, 2003) that female characters, serve as sexual eye-candy. Ten percent of female characters have large breasts and a small waist, with an equal number having disproportionate body types. Twenty percent of female characters expose their breasts, with more than 10% revealing their buttocks.

Stereotypes can be found in virtually any game—Cuban drug dealers in *Vice City*, muscle-bound and violent rappers in *Def Jam Vendetta*, and Arab terrorists in nearly every war game. *Ready to Rumble*, a boxing game, covers all bases, including racialized stereotypes of seemingly every community of color. The most popular character in the game is Afro Thunder, a gigantic Afro-wearing boxer, who is more adept at talking trash than fighting. The game also features a Hawaiian sumo wrestler who speaks poor English and has slanty eyes, a heavy accented Croatian immigrant, and a Mexican boxer named Angel (raging) Rivera. The stereotypes of Asians as martial artists who speak poor English are evident in *Tenchu: Wrath of Heaven*, *Dynasty Warriors*, and *Crouching Tiger*, while violent and muscular black athletes are readily seen in *Street Hoops*, *NBA Live*, and *Madden 2004* (Leonard, 2003).

Another factor that seems neglected in video games is age.

Vasil and Wass (as cited in Dill, 2005) analysed research on the treatment of age in several

different media sources including television and print media. They concluded that, across these studies, the elderly, especially women, were underrepresented. When elderly characters were portrayed, they were depicted negatively, cast in minor roles, and underdeveloped as characters. The apparent ages of video game characters have never, to our knowledge, been studied empirically.

3.2 Breaking the norm

Although boys and male adolescents appear as regular gamers in self-report investigations of the frequency of gaming in schoolchildren, even studies from the early and mid-1990s suggest that a large percentage of females report playing computer games for approximately 1- 2 hours a week. For example, Funk found that 75% of females, compared with 90% of males played computer games in the home and Colwell et al. showed that 88% of the 12 - 14 year old females surveyed played computer games on a regular basis. Similarly, contemporary research reported by Interactive Digital Software Association. (IDSA) suggests that 43% of US gamers are female (Bryce, 2002).

Certain female video game characters appear more powerful than they used to, one of them is The Boss from the Metal Gear Solid series. Matulef from Eurogamer (Matulef, 2012) had this to say about The Boss; “The Boss is often touted as being one of the strongest female characters in gaming” (see image 1). Another strong female character, and maybe the first ever female protagonist, is Samus Aran from Metroid Prime (see image.2). Scheeden from IGN (Scheeden, 2008) says that; Samus herself was most notable in that she was one of the first major female protagonists in any video game. However, thanks to her silent demeanor and fearsome, hulking battle suit, few gamers realized this interstellar bounty hunter was more than a simple cybernetic warrior. Much like fellow Nintendo alumnus Link, she rarely offers much in the way of conversation, but gamers around the world have fallen in love with her just the same.

These are some of the examples how a character can be interesting and beautiful without any stereotypes. But many more characters are victim of these stereotypes and the key to eradicate these stereotypes is through the use of good character design.



Image 1. The Boss from Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater. Image found online.



Image 2. Samus from Metroid Prime in her suit. Image found online.

3.3 Character Design


Therefore to avoid certain stereotypes, correct character design plays a crucial role in a production, especially in video games, since the character is the player themselves in game. These characters are the equivalent of a movie cast. As character design evolved over the years, it became clear that it wasn't enough for these characters to just be able to move. The personalities of these characters had to evolve and become fully believable, to become more realistic (White, 2006).

The deep analysis for a character is really important, be it a newly created character or an already existing one. It is necessary, because the audience demands more now, than what it demanded years ago. So it's not enough for an analysis to just say that a character is cute or

has a good personality, especially if that character is the protagonist of a movie or a video game. It makes a difference if the character is from San Francisco or from Bronx, if they are 13 years old or 16 years old, if they like to play basket more than chess, if they are shy near girls of even if they are deaf in one ear (Hooks, 2003 pp. 21).

In order to correctly and efficiently design a character, we first start from drawing the larger parts or shapes of said character. We experiment and play with these shapes and then we begin adding details. The design process starts from top to bottom and from right to left or left to right for those that are left handed dominant. Also, we first draw the character's head and face so that we can feel the characters personality and their thoughts (Umoto, 2010).

Another important element in character design, are the archetypes. The archetypes represent the personality of the character and their characteristics, with which a person can identify with. Therefore, these archetypes are the basis of a character, for example, it determines if the character is the protagonist of a story, what is their age and other important information (Tillman, 2012).

One of the most typical stereotype for a video game character, is that the protagonist is always a super hero or a genetically advanced super soldier and rarely a normal man or woman. In the case of the video game Dead Space, it's the opposite, the protagonist Isaac Clarke is an everyday man caught in a nightmarish situation. The helps the player come closer to the character and identify with him. Isaac is an engineer in profession, and that is not just to make him believable or ground the character, but it's also a way to make him fit into the world. But Isaac Clarke didn't start with an already finished design. He had to go through a series of changes, at the start he was the classic video game hero, he was tougher and more heroic. A continuous pattern in the game are the "ribs", they are constantly repeated in the architecture of the game. This pattern is an important element on Isaac's suit (see  3). The ribs on his suit fit with the spaceship he is in, and so he gains an identity, but it also helps with the character's image and how the light is reflected on him (Robinson, 2013).

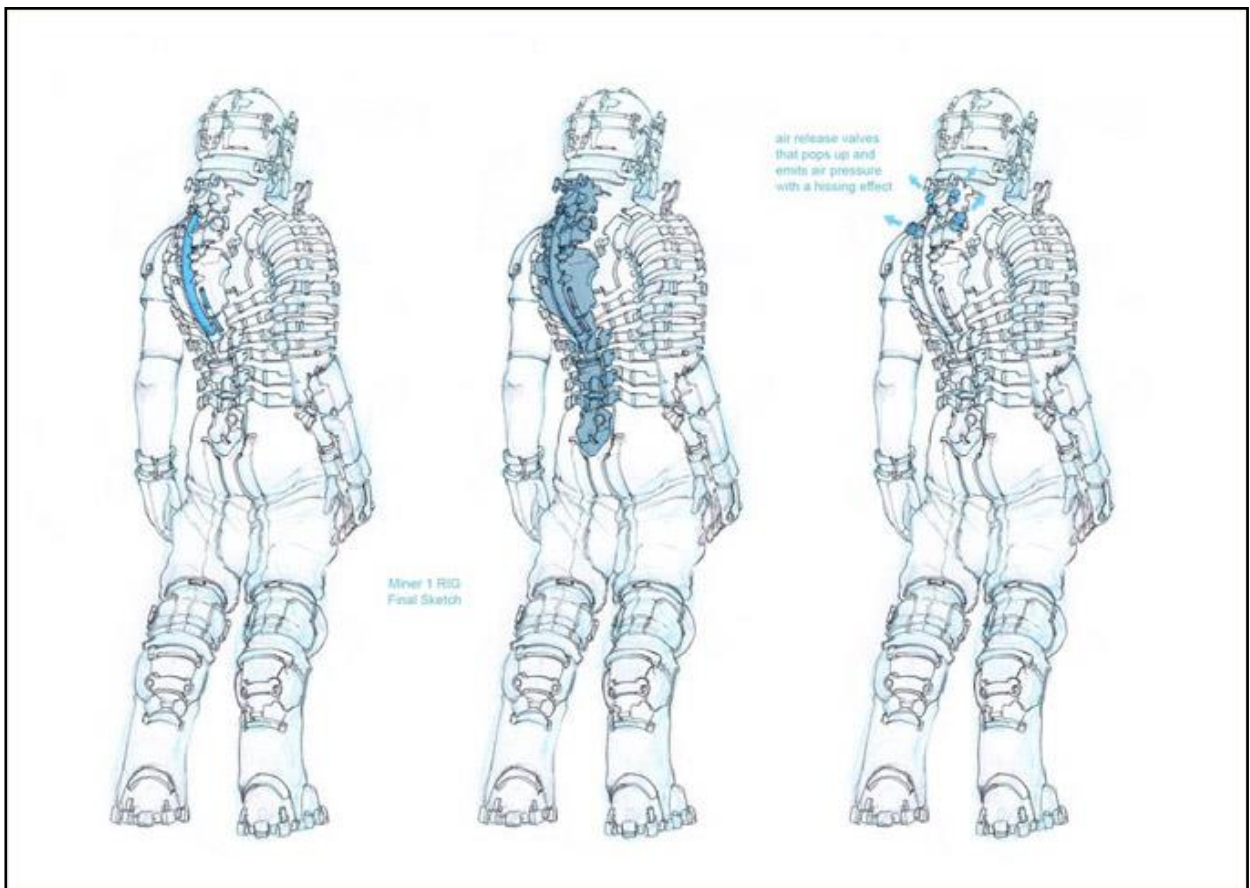


Image 3. Isaac Clark's suit - Concept Art from Dead Space. Image found online.

3.4 Anatomy and other technicalities

According to Woodcock the Anatomy is one of the fundamentals of drawing. The average adult human body is around eight heads high (see Img. 4). Children are born with larger heads relative to the rest of their body, but that ratio diminishes as they grow older – from around three heads high at birth to the adult average. The process reverses as the body ages, and people appear to grow shorter (due to curvature of the spine and a more bent-leg posture). When designing human-scale, use the head-height to determine the proportions. The fewer the heads, the more child-like in appearance the character will be. The trade-off is between ‘cuteness/appeal’ at one end of the scale and ‘power/presence’ at the other. But also, the proportions for women are a little different from men; their legs are longer relative to their height and so their torsos appear shorter. Female necks are not longer than men's; it just looks that way because the female trapezius muscle is less bulky than a man's. Also, the upper body is shorter, the pelvis is wider, which makes the angle of the thigh bone (femur) to the knee joint more acute. Using heads as measure for height is quick and useful, but there is another way of dividing up the body. The halfway point is at the hips, the bottom of the shoulder muscle divides the upper half, and the knee divides the bottom. Again, this gives average human proportions. Another important thing to note is the skeleton. The human

skeleton is the supporting structure of the body. It is articulated by the musculature, which is controlled by the brain via the central nervous system. There are around 205 bones in the body, depending on how many have fused together by adulthood. While a thorough knowledge of human anatomy is essential for any serious artist and should remain your ultimate goal, at this stage you just need to understand the body's articulation points so that your character's poses and postures seem plausible, even when they are wildly exaggerated (Woodcock, 2007).

And characters can have different poses and postures, depending on the character of course. Miller and Baugh both horror comic illustrators say that the standard rule for drawing dynamic comic book characters is to make them proud and tall, with their heads held high, their backs slightly arched, and their chest thrust out. On the other hand though, horror characters are different, a zombie needs to slouch. A werewolf should lunge forward. An old hag should look like she's in serious need of visiting a chiropractor. Frankenstein's monster was stitched together from a bunch of dead body parts, so he should look like he might just fall apart at any second. Horror characters are tortured beings, and their poses should be twisted and tortured as well. Their body language should make readers feel their pain (Miller & Baugh, 2004).

A simple mannequin is the best way to begin the figure's construction and develop a convincing pose. This mannequin conforms to the artistically proportioned eight-head-unit-tall figure, with all the major anatomical details clearly indicated. Although the mannequin is simple, maintaining correct proportion is essential, as this drawing will be the foundation for the finished work. A strong line of action should run through a natural pose. Trace a line from the top of the mannequin's head, along the spine and down the leg to the floor. This line should be simple and elegant; anything more complex than a simple curve may look awkward. The mannequin also helps you place the figure in three dimensions. First, place the hands and feet in their desired position. Then link them to the body with the limbs. This is an easy method of establishing which parts of the body are hidden or foreshortened. Consider balance when developing a pose. Placing the head directly between the feet balances the character and provides stability. When the pose places the head beyond the feet, the distribution of weight is off centre – this can be a very effective method of suggesting movement (Dixon, 2008).

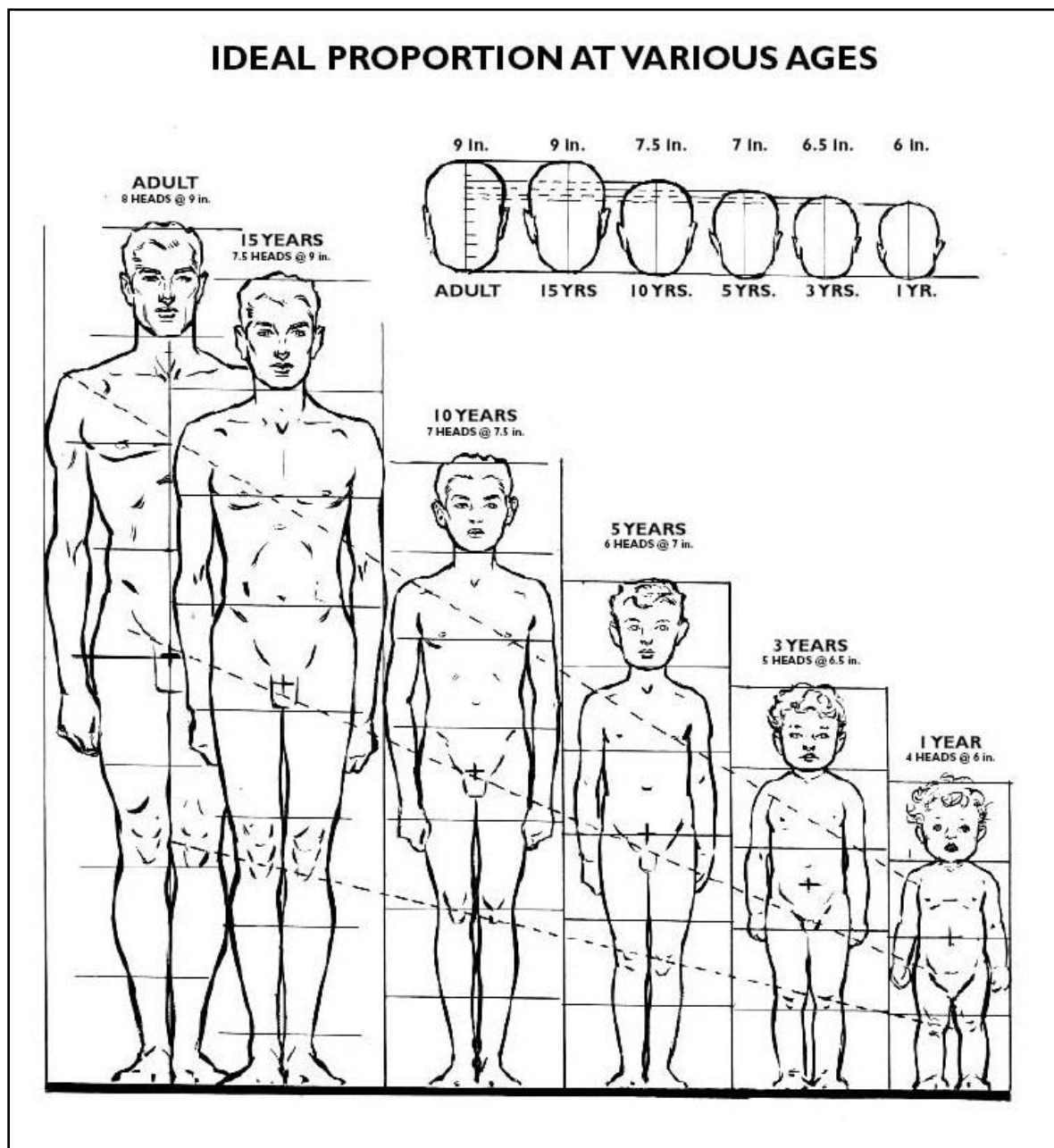


Image 4: Human anatomy – Counting in heads. Image found online.

3.5 Design Techniques

The method that will be used for designing the characters will be a mix of Pen drawing and cell shading. Below these two techniques will be explained.

3.5.1 Cell Shading

Cel shading or cartoon style shading originates from comic books and cartoon movies, this technique is most typically used in entertaining environments, such as video games and animation. A typical cartoon-like depiction is characterized by silhouette and object edges and discrete color tones (Spindler, 2006).

In 3D a cel image is rendered by a computer to have a "toon" look that simulates a traditional

hand-drawn cartoon cel. The toon appearance of a cel image is characterized by the use of areas selectively colored with a fill, a highlight, or a shadow color. This technique started in the early 1900s, from photographs of top-lit line drawings projected in sequence. Images were drawn on clear acetate, which came to be known as "cels" because of the cellulose composition of the material. These acetate cels could be top-lit or back-lit, colored, "multi-planed," etc. Since several cels could be combined, moving elements could easily be isolated from static elements, which provided better efficiency in the very labor intensive operation required to hand draw and color each cel (Arias, 1999)

3.5.2 Pen and Ink

Pen-and-ink illustration uses only black ink strokes over a white surface. It is a limiting medium, since both shading and textures must be suggested by a combination of individual strokes. Furthermore, at least when drawn manually, it is very difficult and time consuming to cover large areas with strokes. However, drawing in pen and ink has some attractive characteristics. First, it is ideal for outlining: each individual stroke can be made expressive by giving it some irregularities in its path and pressure. Second, it can provide an economy of expression: often just a few strokes can clearly indicate the difference between textures like smooth glass and rough stone. The field of pen-and-ink illustration is vast, and it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to provide a comprehensive treatment. However, the principles that we will describe next are sufficient to motivate the design choices of a pen-and-ink rendering system. The treatment of these principles is organized into three parts: Strokes, Tones and textures, and Outlines. In traditional pen-and-ink rendering, a stroke is produced by placing the nib of a pen in contact with the paper and allowing it to trace out a path. Character is given to the stroke by varying the pressure applied to the pen, hence the thickness of the stroke, by wiggling the pen along the path, and by changing the orientation of the pen. The shape of the nib also plays a role in the quality of the stroke; asymmetric nibs, such as those used in calligraphy, result in the thickness varying in relation to the direction of the stroke.

The tone achieved by a combination of strokes is a function of the ratio of black ink over the area of a region of the illustration. In addition to building tones, strokes are also used to evoke textures. The character of the strokes themselves play a role in conveying different surface qualities, such as smoothness or roughness. Strokes can also be arranged in different

ways to indicate complex textures such as bricks or stone walls. The dual role that strokes play in conveying both tones and textures is part of the economy of pen-and-ink illustration.

Real scenes contain no outlines; instead, object boundaries are defined by variations in illumination and texture. However, in pen-and-ink illustration, as well as many other drawing media, tones and textures do not always clearly delimit objects. Outlining becomes a very natural way of delineating distinct surfaces.

The medium of pen and ink is ideal for creating outlines with an incredible range of expressiveness. The pen allows for outlines that change thickness, sometimes disappearing altogether. In addition, the character of the outline strokes can be a powerful indicator of texture (Winkenbach, 1994).

4. Design Methodology

Intro

I decided to design five characters based on the research I did on sexual stereotypes and other stereotypes in video games. But most importantly I based my work mainly on Iraklis Ioannou's "Gender Stereotypes and Gender Portrayal in Video Games: The Case of LOL" thesis, which was focused on analyzing and proving that these sexual stereotypes in video games exist are indeed a problem. The following is the abstract from his thesis:

"Video games are unquestionably an integral part of our lives: they offer entertainment, education, and socializing. Video games fulfill much more than they used to when they first appeared and are by far more prevalent in our everyday routine, especially since the appearance of handheld devices and mobile gaming. Despite popular beliefs, video games do not fail to attract people of all ages and genders. In fact, about 50% of gamers are women – a facet that is often disregarded by video game companies when pitching or designing new video games. Being such a huge source of information to a wide range of people—a range that excludes no one—video games have reasonably been studied extensively. Researches and critics raise controversial matters on video games' content and uses. This thesis focuses on the case of gender portrayal, particularly how gender is generally represented in video games and what stereotypes prevail. This work uses the currently most popular video game, League of Legends, and its 130 playable characters (champions) as a case study, in an attempt to evaluate whether the game embraces or dismisses these gender stereotypes. Results show that the game does embrace certain gender stereotypes. Female champions are only as half as male ones and they are by far, more stereotypically depicted (skinny, small waists, large breasts, conventionally attractive) than men, whose appearances vary and often deviate from ideal standards of beauty. Female champions are also more likely to wear revealing and/or tight clothes, are generally younger, and are sometimes even promoted in certain ways so as to appeal through their bodies rather than skills or power, even though this is a fantasy strategy fighting game. The study provides guidelines for the design of stereotype-free video games and discusses implications of this work for future research and practice"(Ioannou, 2016).

These characters are original and are influenced by good design decisions from other characters and other references. They do not promote any stereotypes but on the contrary promote ideas and designs that are not used usually in today's market, even though they should.

Design Process

Research

Rough Sketches

Interview 1

Final Outlines

Interview 2

Digital Drawings

Coloring and Shadows

Props and Details

Interview 3

Creation of Character
Presentation Sheets

Final Evaluation

4.1 Character Analysis

Below, five original characters will be presented. Firstly some basic info for each character, then an image of the final drawing of the character, and lastly the analysis of the character along with some concept art.

4.1.1 Elizabeth

Name: Elizabeth

Age: 33

Gender: Female

Backstory

Elizabeth is a plague doctor in 14th century Britain, set to cure the plague that is ravaging through the population, killing thousands and turning others into horrible undead abominations. With most of the royal army and doctors dead or worse, armed with sword and medicine, she has taken upon the difficult task to help rid the world from the plague. But women at that time were prohibited from practicing medicine let alone fight as warriors, equal to men. And so, trying to gain the trust of her people and set at ease their superstitions, she hides her identity at all times behind her beak-mask and cloak.



Image 5: Elizabeth Final Form - Front View

Analysis

At the early stages of her concept, Elizabeth wasn't a woman at all. I started drawing a male doctor, but as I read more into the history of that time, I found out that women weren't allowed to practice medicine at that time. And so I decided that it would be fitting to make the plague doctor female, to go against any stereotypes. But I had to make her believable, so I played with the idea of women not being able to be doctors, and decided to make her a woman but not look exactly like one. The concept of the plague doctors protecting themselves from the miasma with their masks and long coats but at the same time concealing their identities helped me with the idea of hiding her true identity. She is a plague doctor, and she is supposed to be dressed like one, but at the same time she is a warrior. So I had to find a happy medium between a warrior and a doctor. So I decided to give her a coat but leave it open so she would be able to move more freely and fight more freely. For the head area I gave her of course the beak mask, but at first I was thinking of giving her a hood (see image.7, image.8, image.11), but I wanted her long hair to be visible so I decided against that and gave her a big witch-like hat(see img.9). The rest were small details to make her more believable, for example, her sword, her torn coat and the vials with medicine on her chest. Also for this character, I spent the most time as it was difficult for me to finally decide how to make her look, the other characters thankfully were much easier to create and thus required less time and rough sketches to reach the final stage.

Sketches and Early Drawings



Image 6: Early concept art for Elizabeth



Image 7: Early Concept Art or Elizabeth (Trying Different Masks and Attire)



Image 8: Early Concept Art or Elizabeth (Trying Different Masks and Attire)

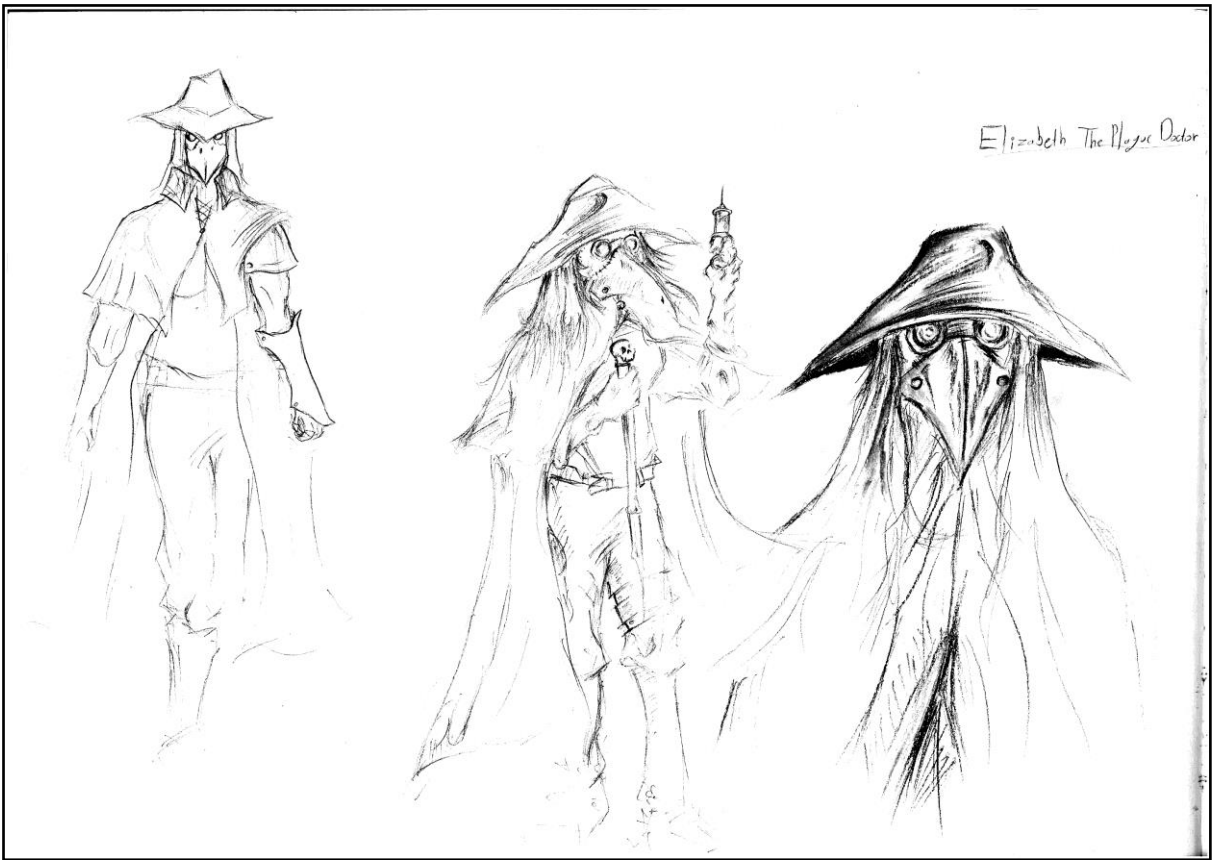


Image 9: Early Concept Art of Elizabeth (Trying Different Masks and Attire)

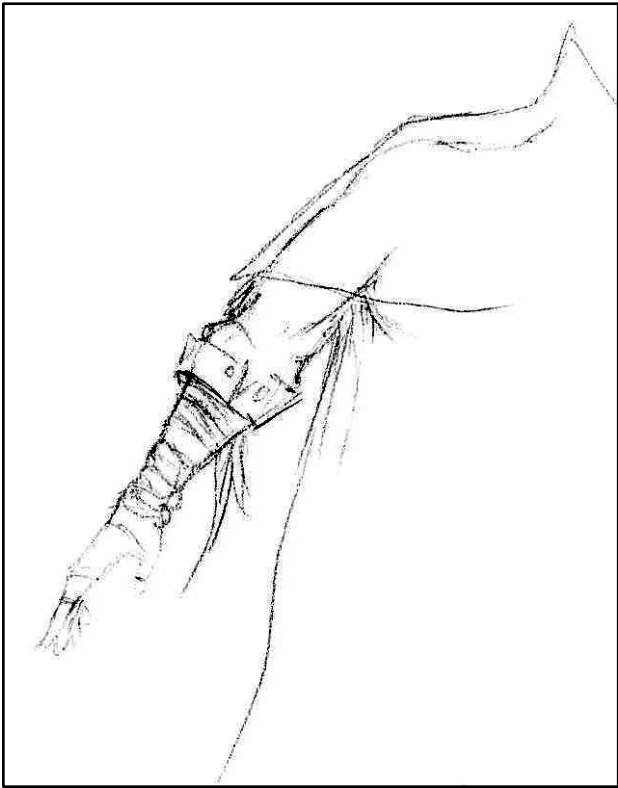


Image 10: Male Arm sketch



Image 11: Hooded Plague Doctor/Cultist

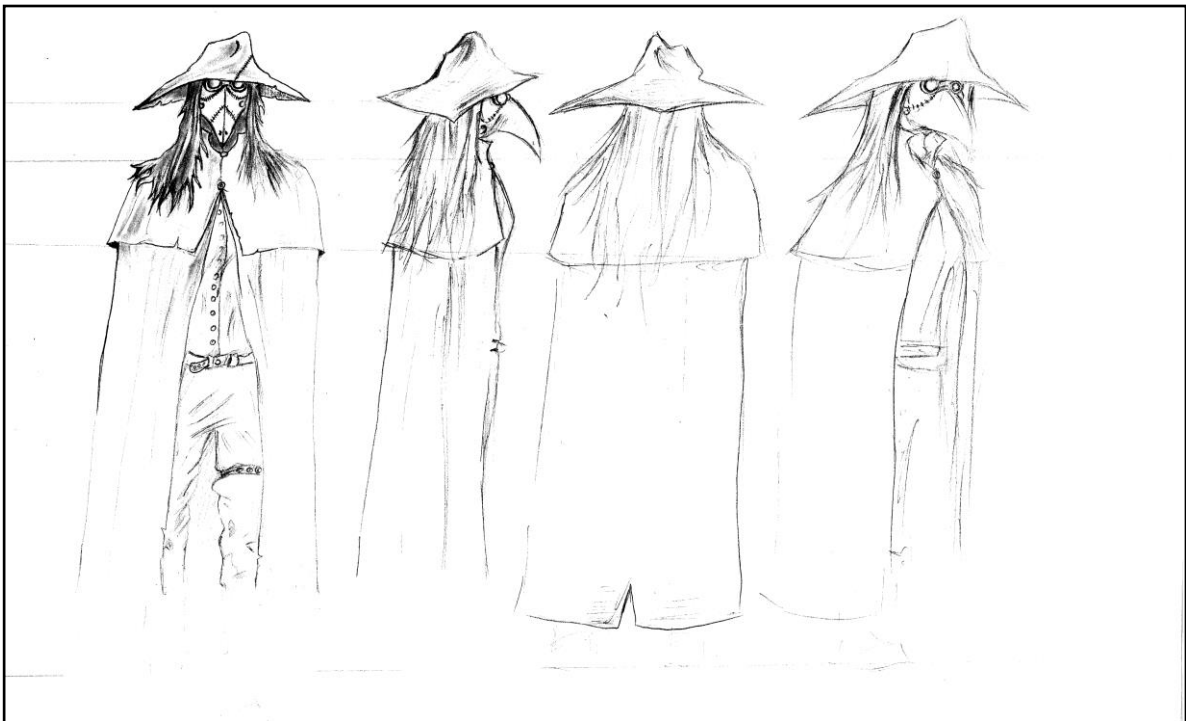


Image 12: Elizabeth's First form.



Image 13: Standing Pose Sketch



Image 14: Early stages of digital drawing and coloring process

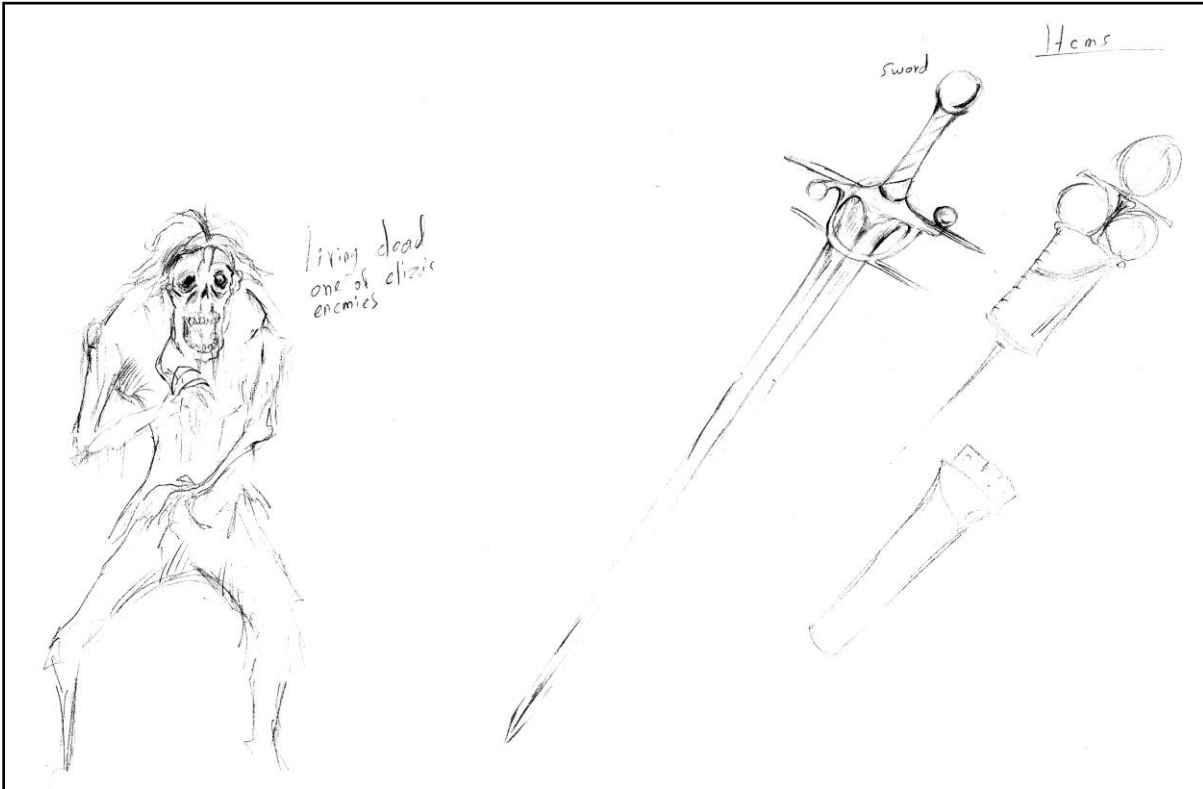


Image 15: Props and ideas for enemy creatures in the supposed game



Syringe
filled with an antidote



Sword
Elizabeth's main weapon



Biography:

Elizabeth is a plague doctor in 14th century Britain, set to cure the plague that is ravaging through the population, killing thousands and turning others into horrible undead abominations. With most soldiers and doctors dead or worse, armed with sword and medicine, she has taken upon the quest to help rid the world from the plague. But women at that time were prohibited from practicing medicine let alone fight as warriors, equal to men. And so, trying to gain the trust of her people she hides her identity at all times behind her beak-mask and cloak.

References



Image 16: Final Character Presentation Sheet

4.1.2 Revenant

Name: Revenant

Age: Unknown

Gender: Unknown

Backstory:

In a desolate battlefield where hundreds of corpses lay rotting under the burning sun, a shadowy figure stands alone. Risen from the dead in an ancient crypt unseen by the eyes of the living for thousands of years. It wanders the world aimlessly and alone, no one knows where it came from, who it was or is, they simply call it the Revenant.

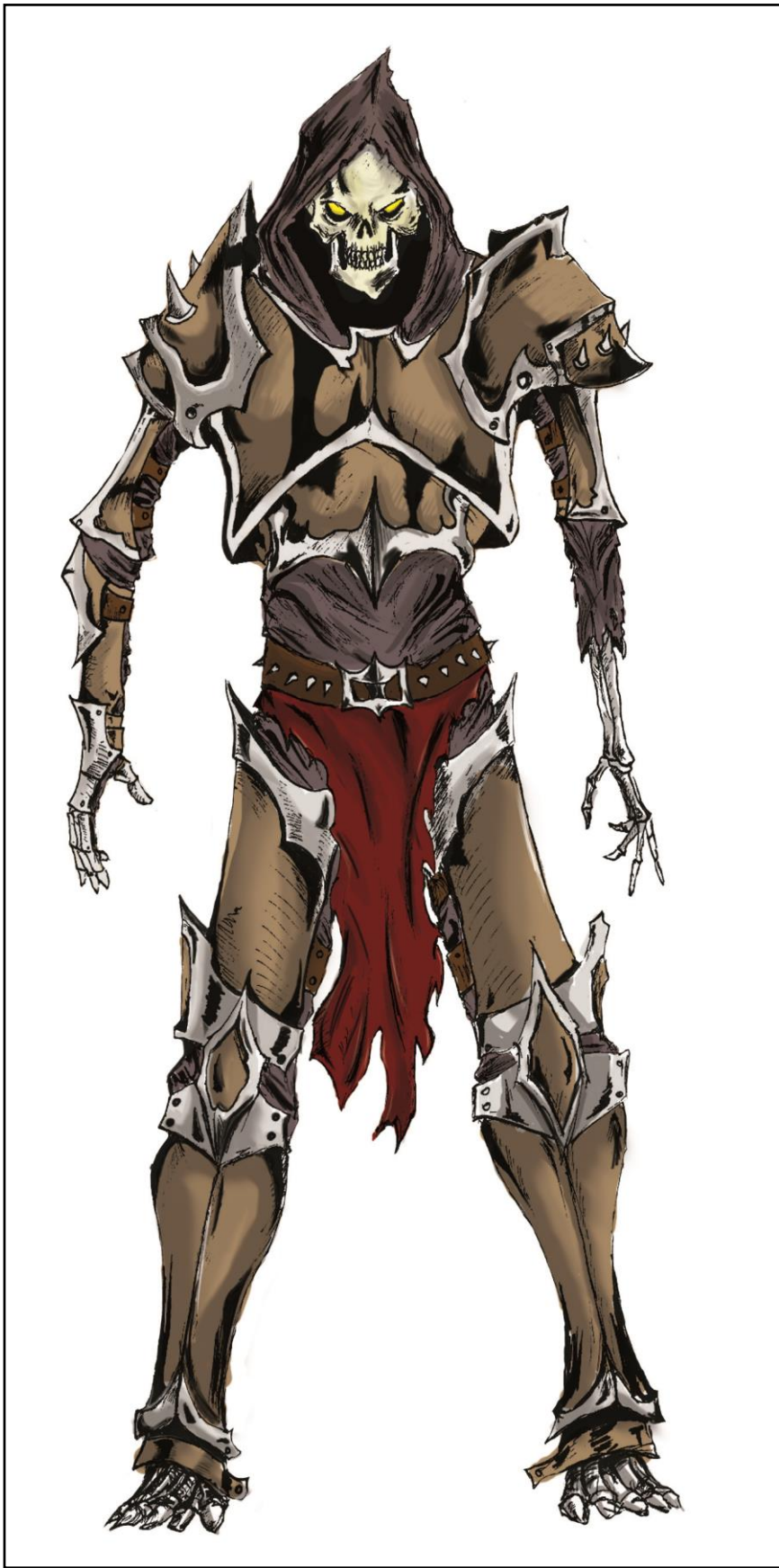


Image 17: Revenant final form – Front View

Analysis:

The revenant is the second character that designed, for this character I knew right from the start what to do and how to do it. I wanted a character without an identity, so the supposed player or viewer could give it one. So I created an undead warrior, a skeleton, since all humans are pretty much the same on the inside, and you cannot tell it's gender by looking on its face alone or its body (maybe from a number of small details between the male and female skeleton). In conclusion my purpose was to create a character that is easier for the supposed player to identify with, a neutral character in terms of gender, race and age.

Sketches and Early Drawings

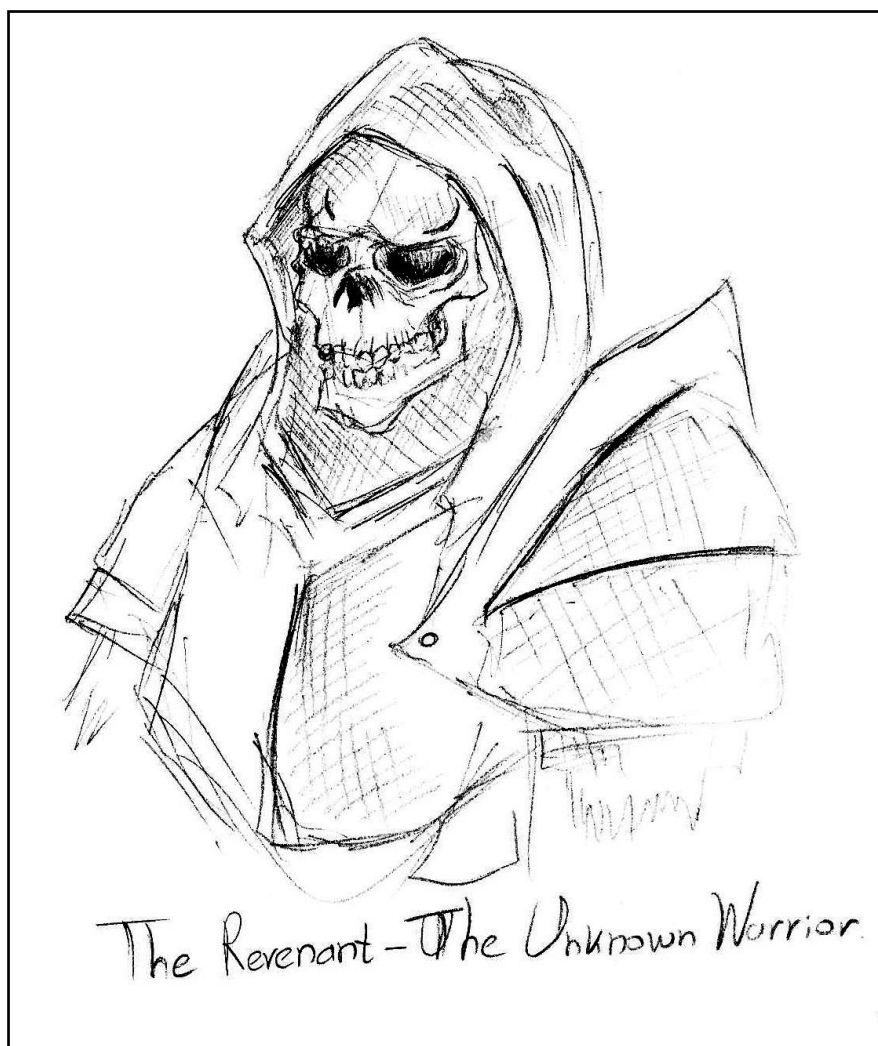


Image 18: First sketch of the Revenant

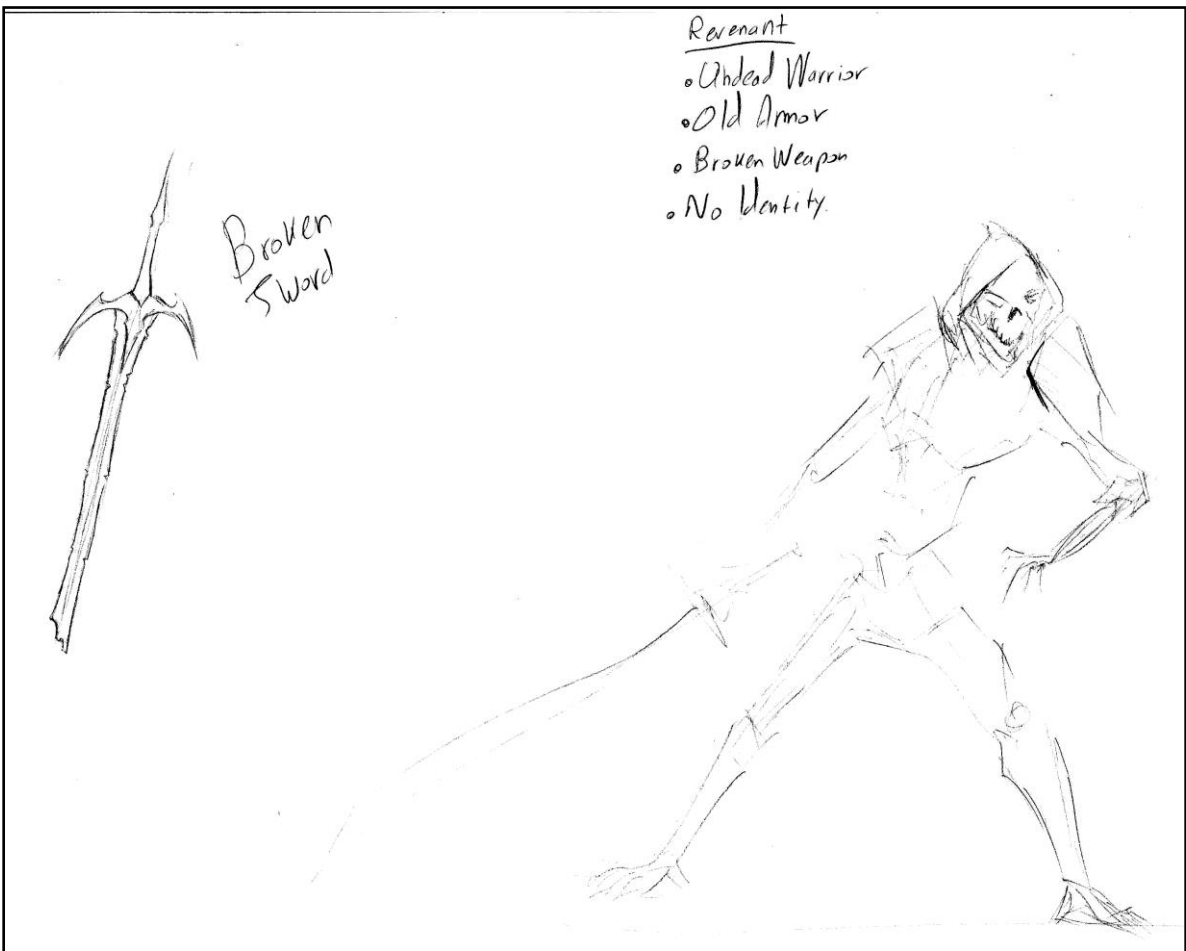


Image 19: Early Sketches

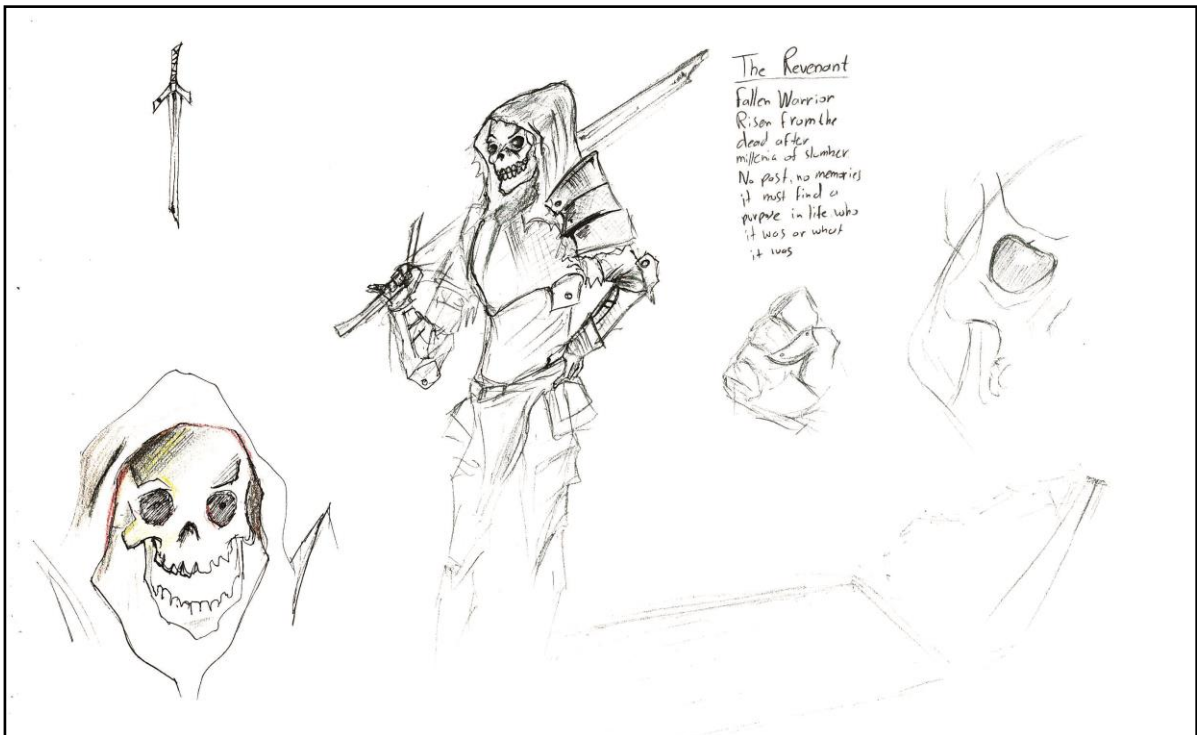


Image 20: Early Sketches

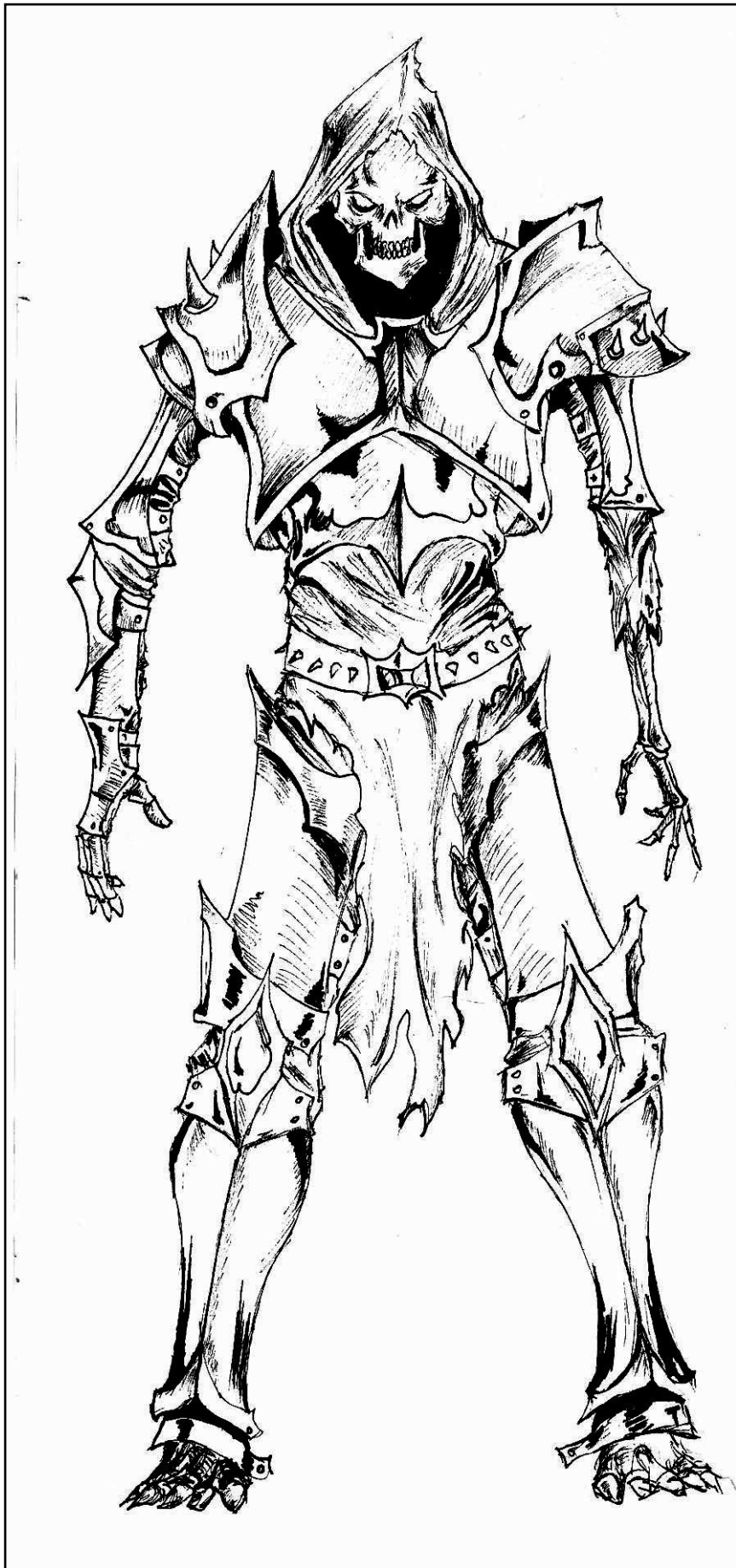


Image 21: Final outline on paper of the character.

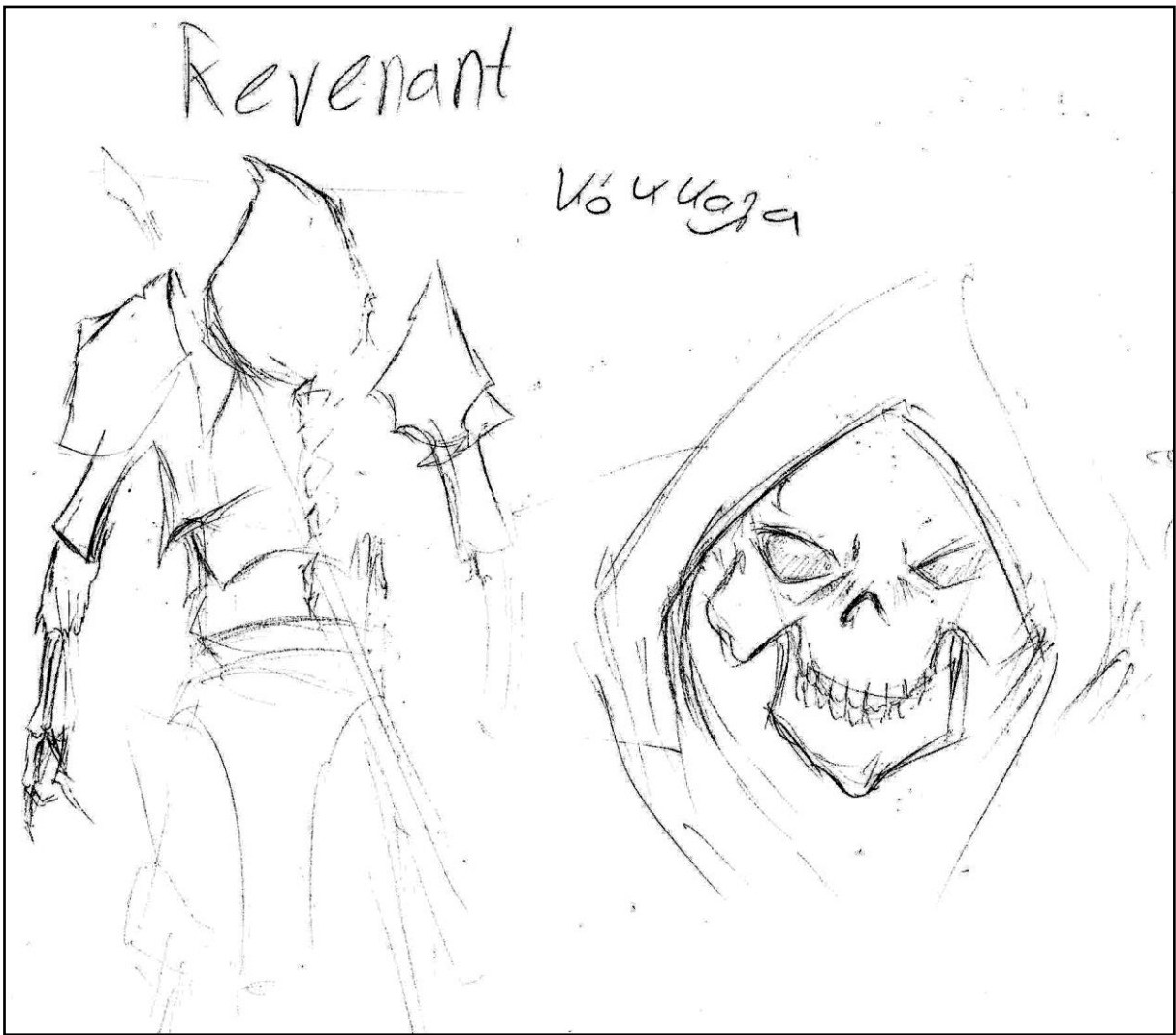


Image 22: Sketches of the backside of the character and a close up of its face.



Image 23: Early digital drawing of Revenant's face.



Image 24: Final digital drawing of Revenant's face.

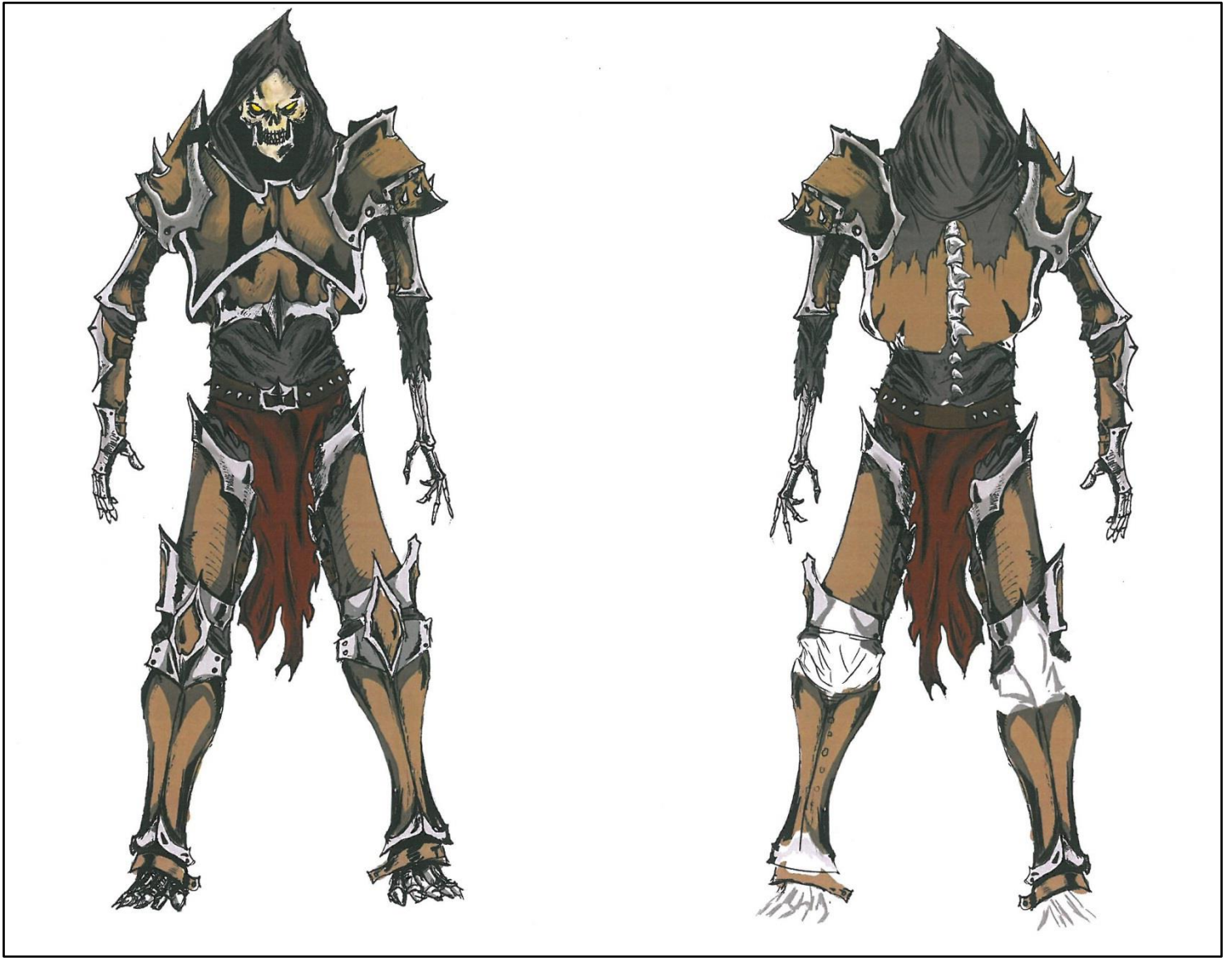


Image 25: Digital Drawing process of both sides



Image 26: Revenant's left shoulder plate added as a prop.

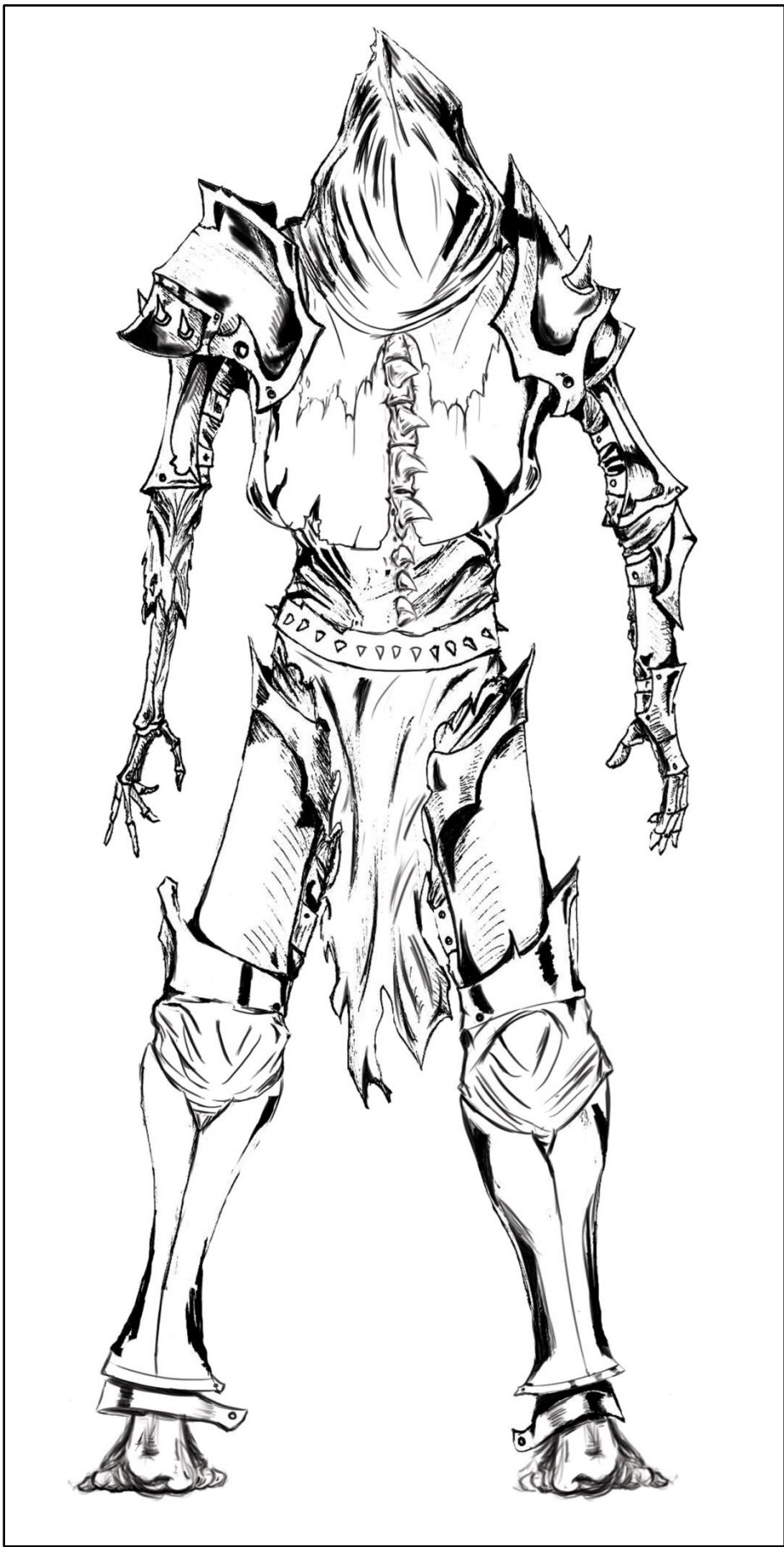
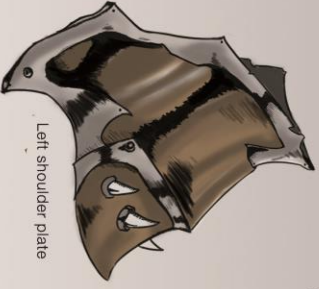
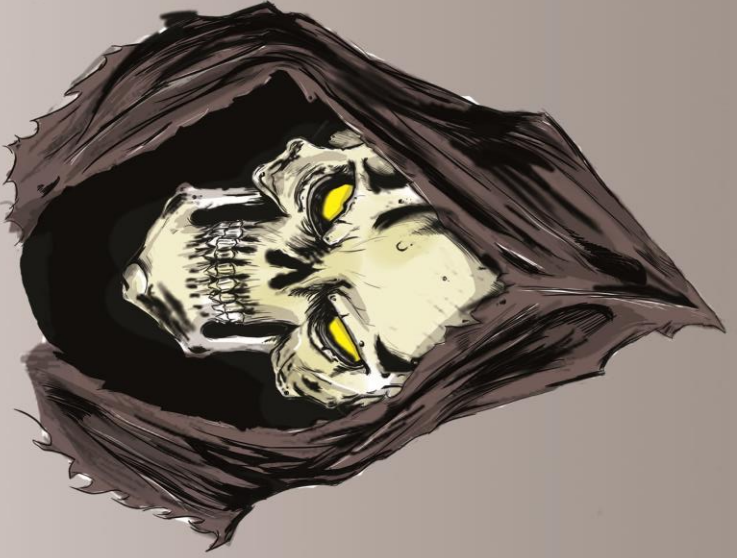


Image 27: Final outline of Revenant's backside



Left shoulder plate

Biography:
Risen from the dead, this restless ancient warrior wanders the world of the living without purpose. Without memory of it's past life, it wonders the world in search of a purpose or an identity. People gave it the name Revenant, a fitting name, for a restless soul left with unfinished and unknown business.



References



Image 28: Final Character Presentation Sheet

4.1.3 The Master

Name: The Master

Age: 72

Gender: Male

Backstory:

A legendary warrior simply known by his people as The Master, hailing from the east, he lived in his dojo with his two grandchildren. From a young age he trained to fight, and is well versed in the language of war, his comrades called him The Master for his expertise in combat. He fought for many years under the banner of the emperor until finally after a lifetime spent in war he retired and settled with his wife. He fathered one child, his son and in turn after many years his son had two children. But tragedy struck, and one fateful night he lost everything, the only thing that remained was his two grandchildren, so he took them and retreated into the mountains to raise his two fatherless grandchildren in an old dojo, he thought he could at last live in peace, but fate would not have it so. After many years living in hiding his grandchildren were taken by the same evil that took the lives of his wife and son. Enraged and tired of running away, he picked his old battle stave and ventured into forgotten lands to rescue his only family.

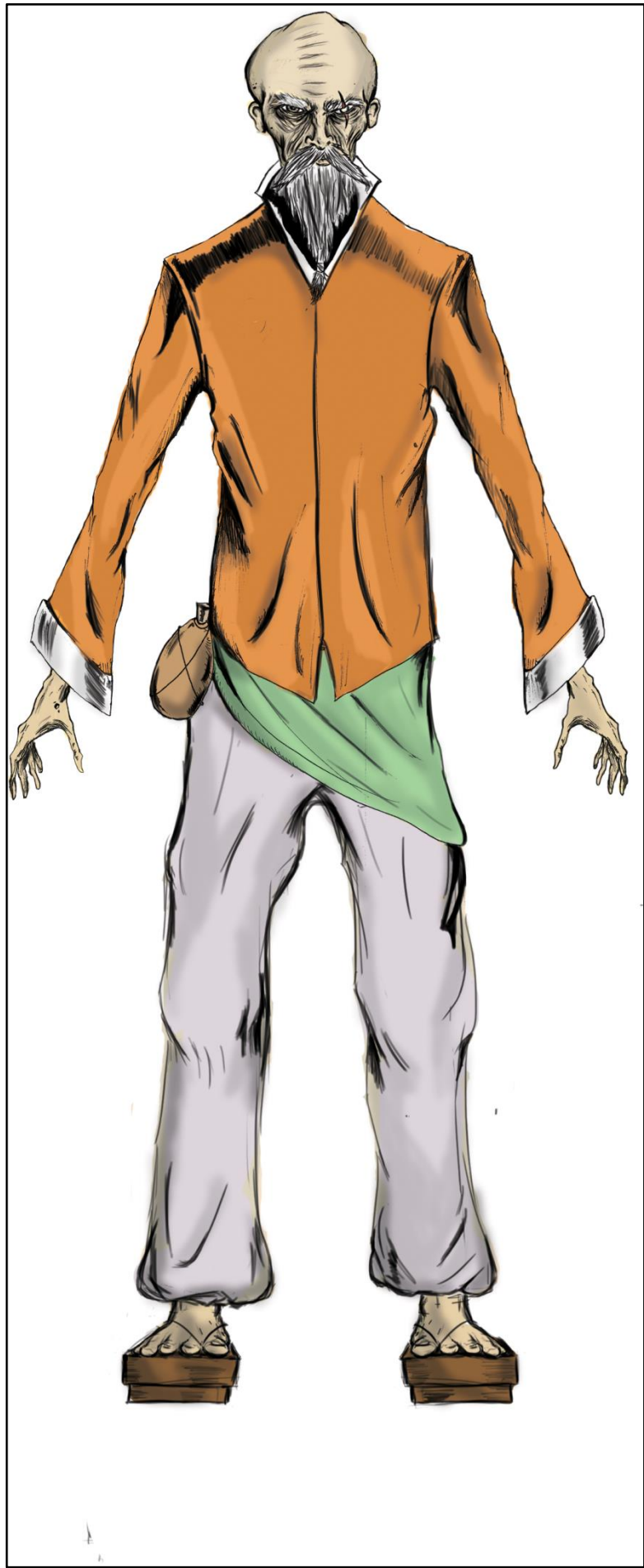


Image 29: The Master final form – Front View

Analysis:

For my third character I wanted to create an old and wise warrior. So I immediately thought of an elderly Asian man. I wanted him to look old but still give the feeling that he is still strong and can defeat his adversaries with ease. The reason that I wanted to create an elderly character, is because of the lack of representation of elderly main characters in video games. The rare occasions that an elderly character would be shown in a video game, would be a supportive role or a very minor role. And they would often be depicted as frail and weak.

Sketches and Early Drawings

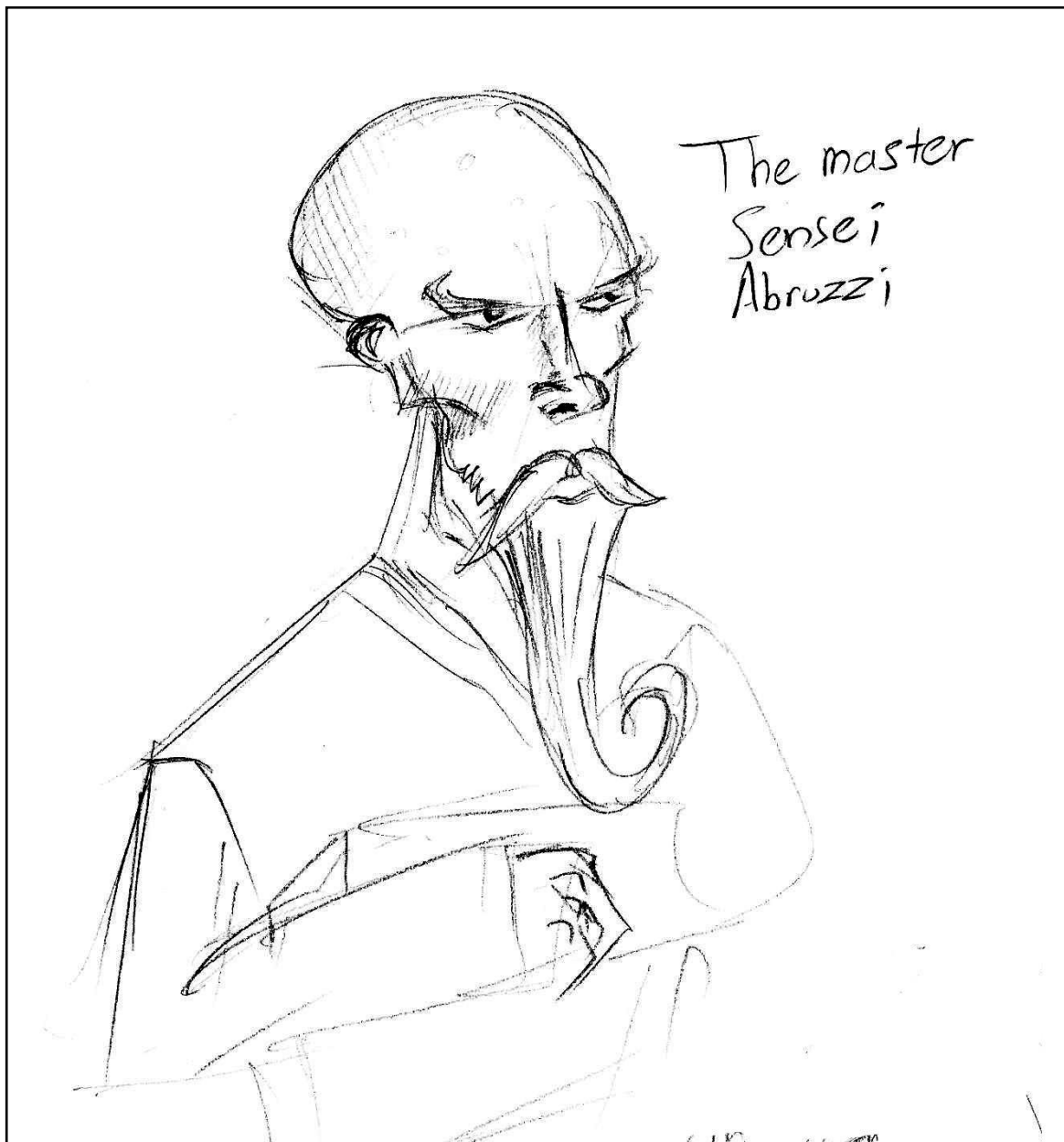


Image 30: Early sketch of The Master

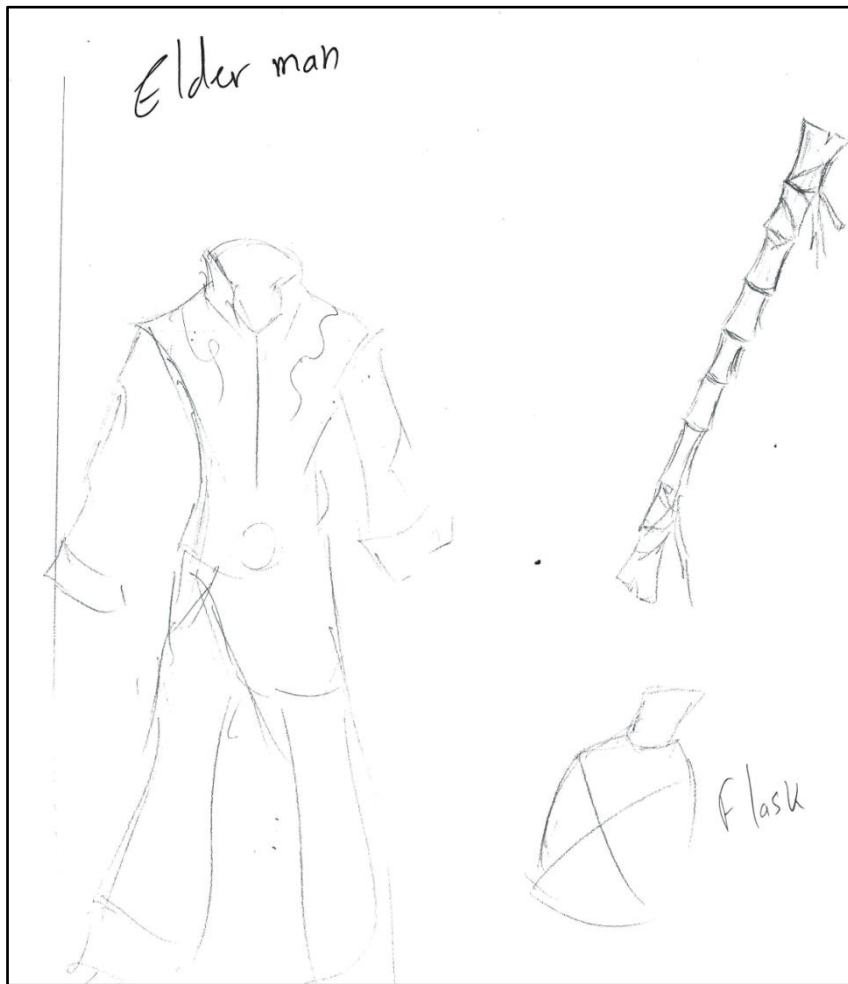


Image 31: Early concept ideas for The Master

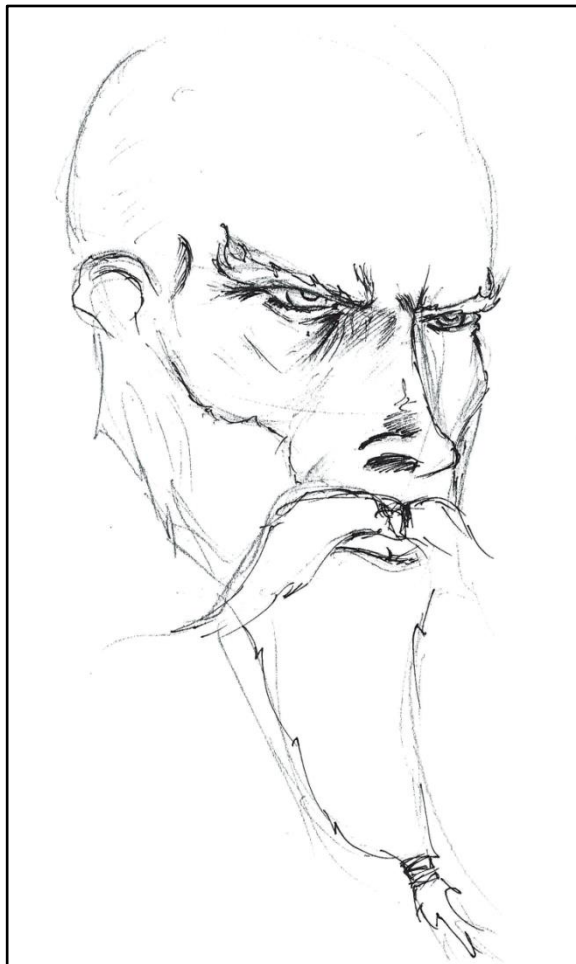


Image 32: Early sketch of The Master's face.

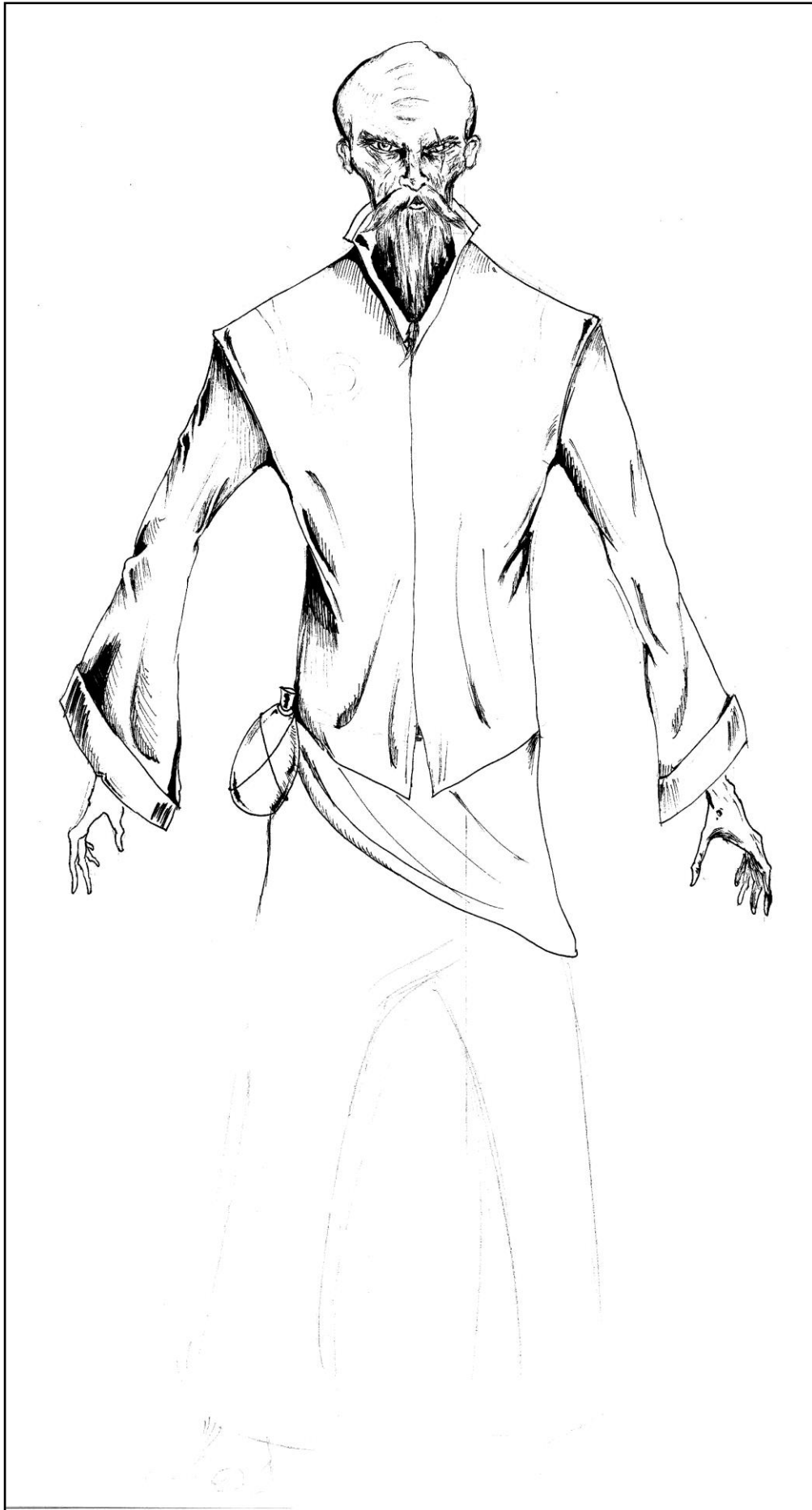


Image 33: Final outline of The Master in progress

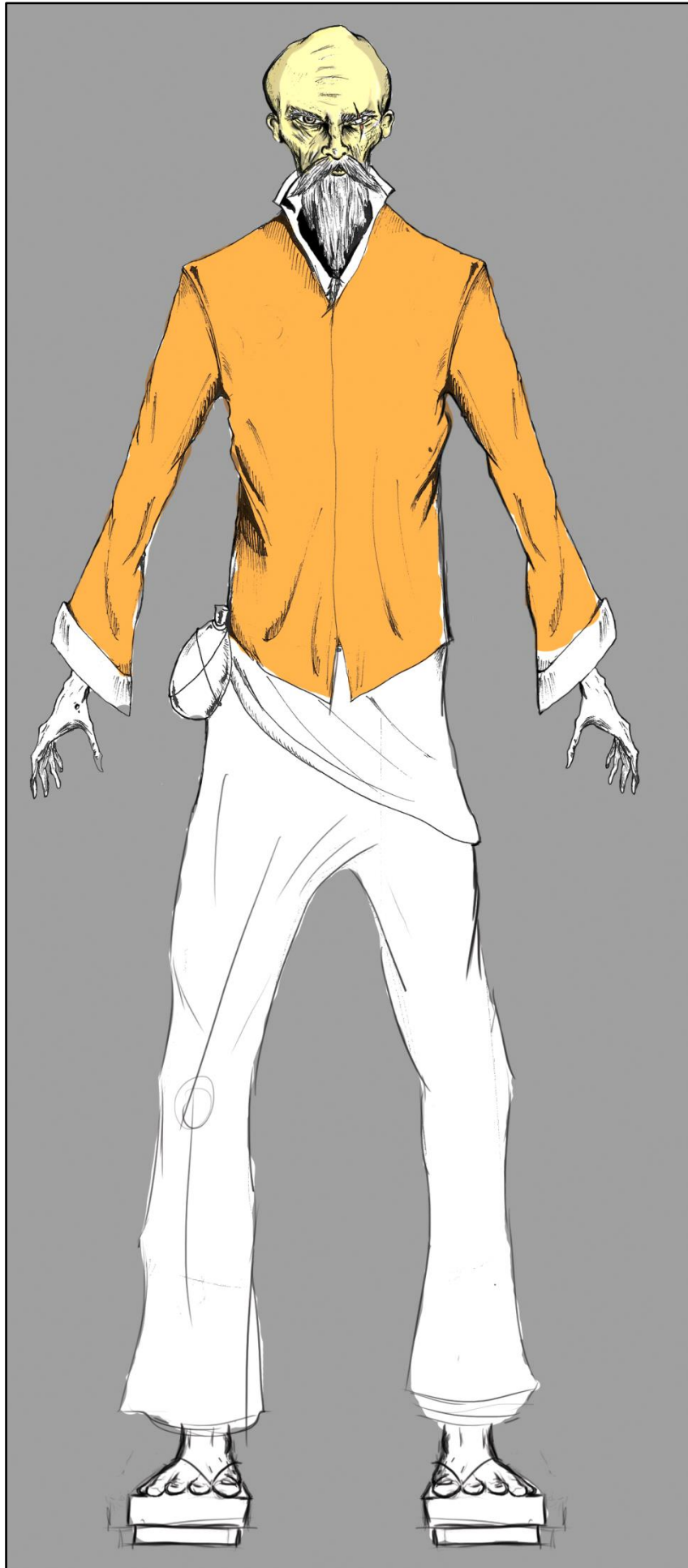


Image 34: Digital drawing of the Master in progress.

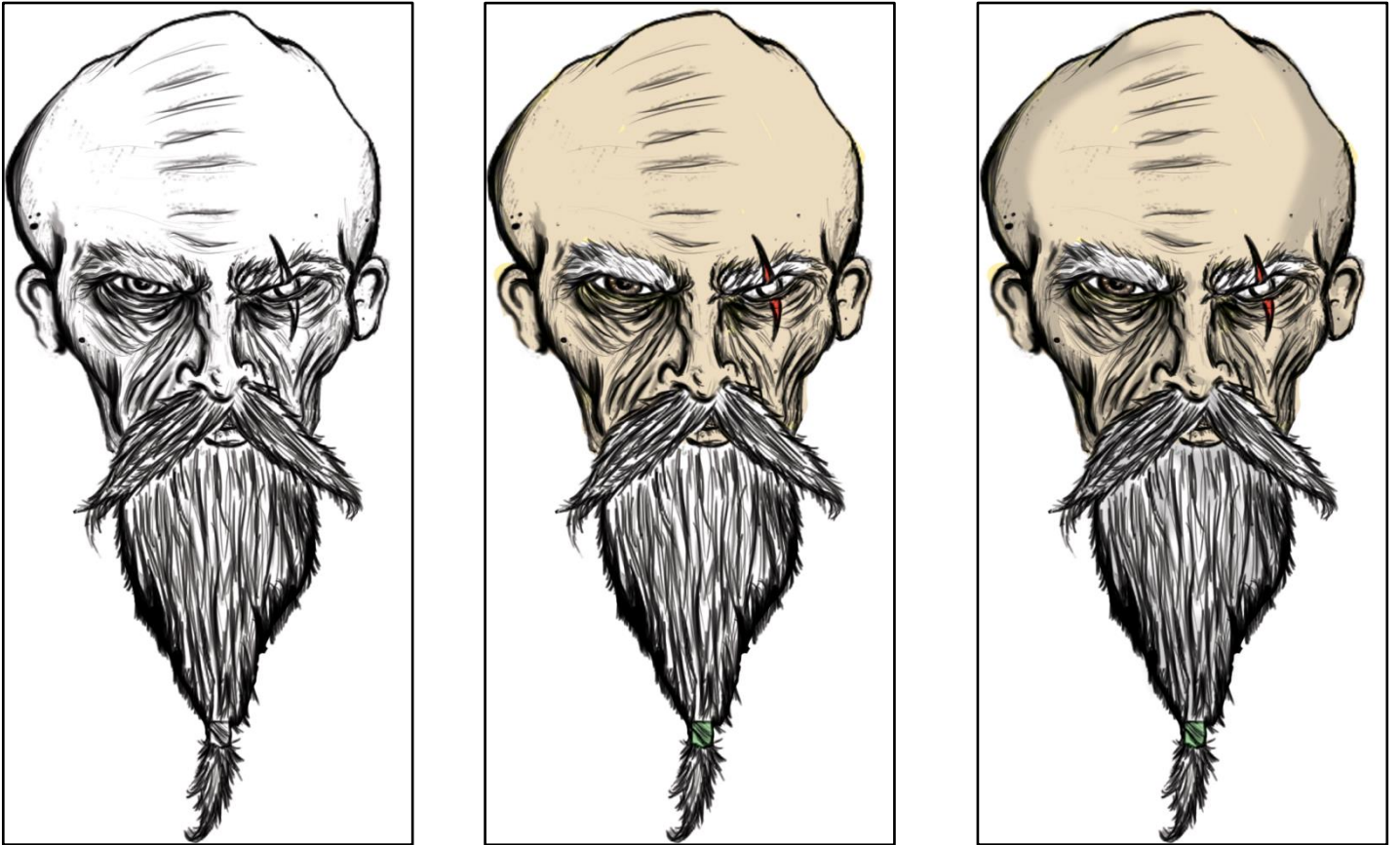


Image 35: Final digital drawing process of The Master's face

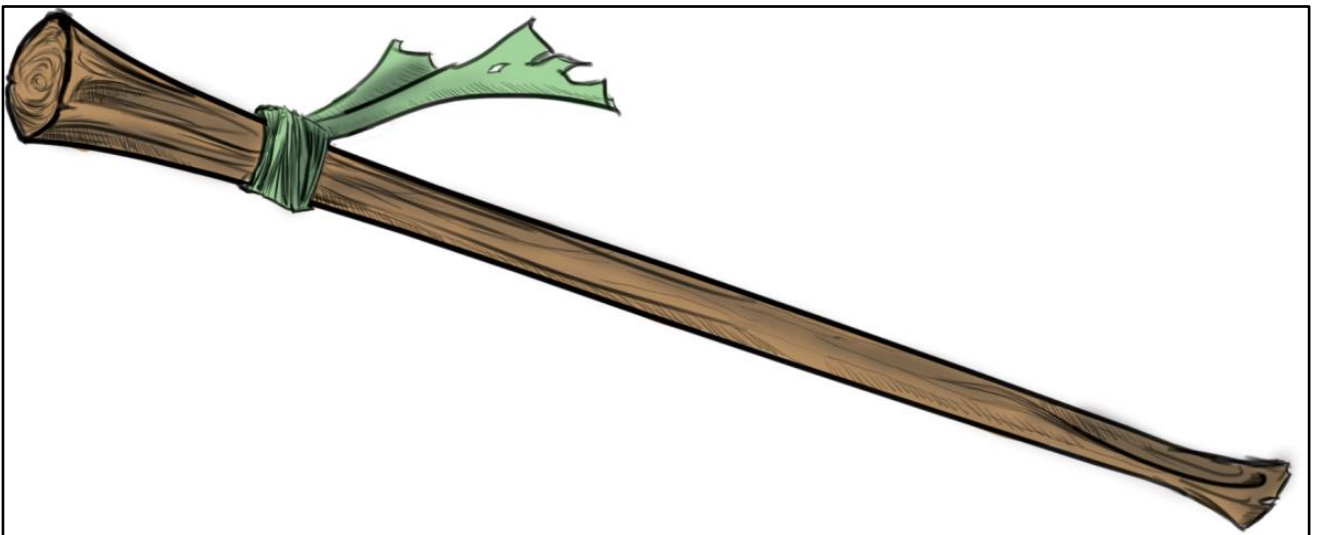


Image 36: Training Staff/ Battle Stave. The Master's weapon as a prop

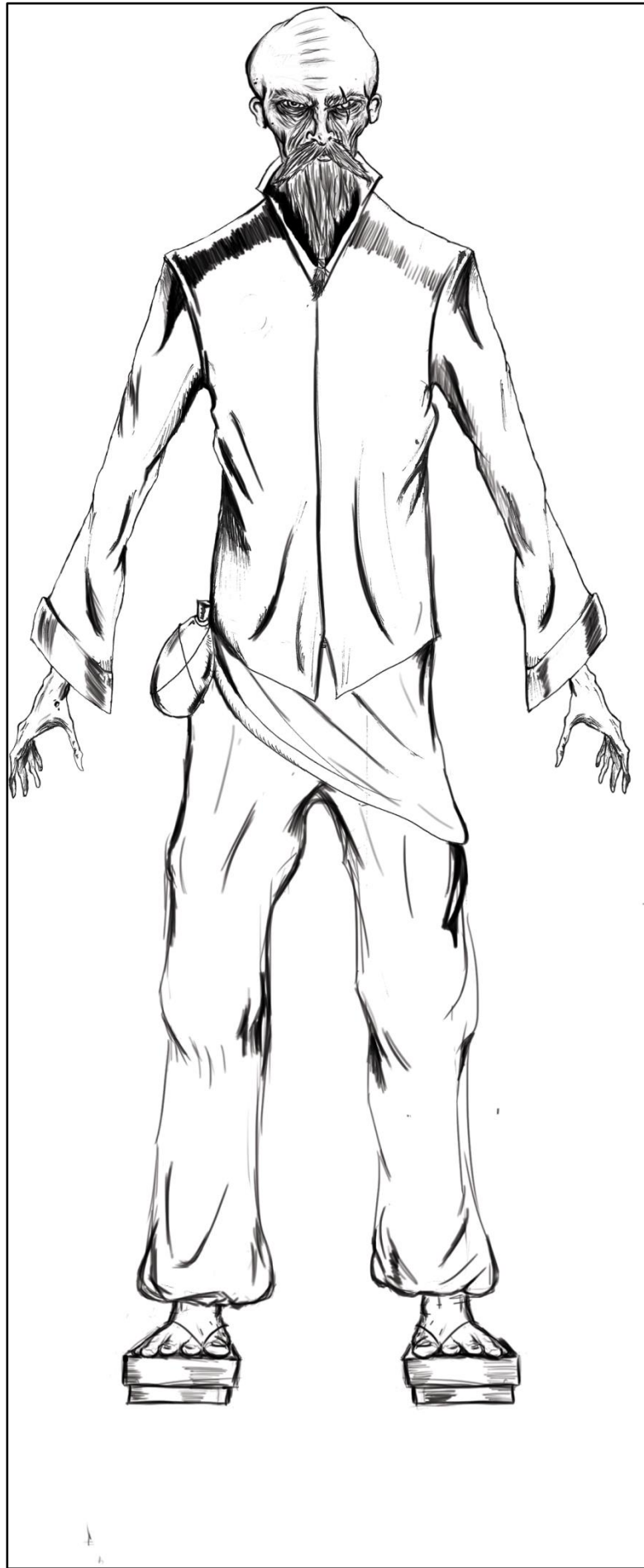


Image 37: The Master's final front side outline

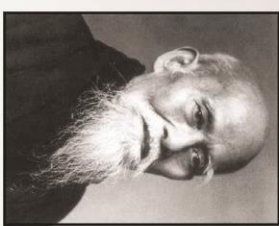
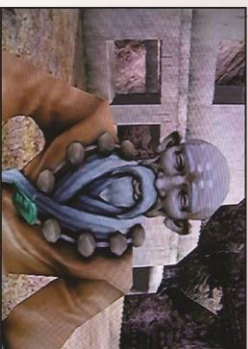


Image 38: The Master's final backside outline

Training Staff
The Master's weapon of choice



References



Biography:

Marital arts master, and wise man, The Master searches the land for his lost grand children. Traversing ancient sites and labyrinths he believes they were taken by an ancient demon. He might be old, but nothing will stop him from saving his grand children, using his knowledge and experience he overcomes foes and obstacles with ease.

Image 39: Final character presentation sheet.

4.1.4 Black Mamba

Name: Black Mamba

Age: 14

Gender: Male

Backstory:

War never changes, it destroys the lives of everyone it touches, women, men and children suffer indiscriminately from its consequences. Child soldiers are a common thing in war-torn Africa, children at a very young age are trained to kill without remorse, losing their innocence in the process. The Black Mamba is one of these children, he now leads a small renegade group of child soldiers after the mercenaries that they worked for were killed. The other children looked up to him, after all he is older, more experienced than them and his skills in combat rivals those of a veteran soldier. On the outside he may look innocent, but on the inside a stone cold killer resides, that is why the mercenaries that raised him named him after a highly venomous snake the “Black Mamba”. Now he and his renegade group named “Les enfants terribles” meaning: “The terrible children”, fight for their survival in a war torn land in an attempt to create a better future for themselves.



Image 40: The Black Mamba final form - Front view

Analysis:

After playing hundreds of military games, I have seen only one game portraying child soldiers. So I thought it would be a cool idea to have a game where the protagonist is a child instead of an adult soldier. So I decided to create an African child as a soldier, firstly I started searching for images of African children, what they wear and how they look, then I researched child soldiers in Africa. When I had all the references I needed, I started drawing a child's face, it took me a few attempts to do it correctly, because I wanted to draw an "innocent" child's face that was actually a trained killer. So the character had to look like a child but he had to look like he went through a lot of hardships. I played around with some accessories, like the bandanna and the tooth necklace. But at the end I had to draw the face again in order to show a close up of the character's face, and I did that by drawing over the old one.

Sketches and Early Drawings



Image 41: Early sketch of Black Mamba

Image 42: Early sketch of Black Mamba



Image 43: Final Outline process



Image 44: Digital drawing process
(Old Face)



Image 45: Black Mamba's weapon as a prop

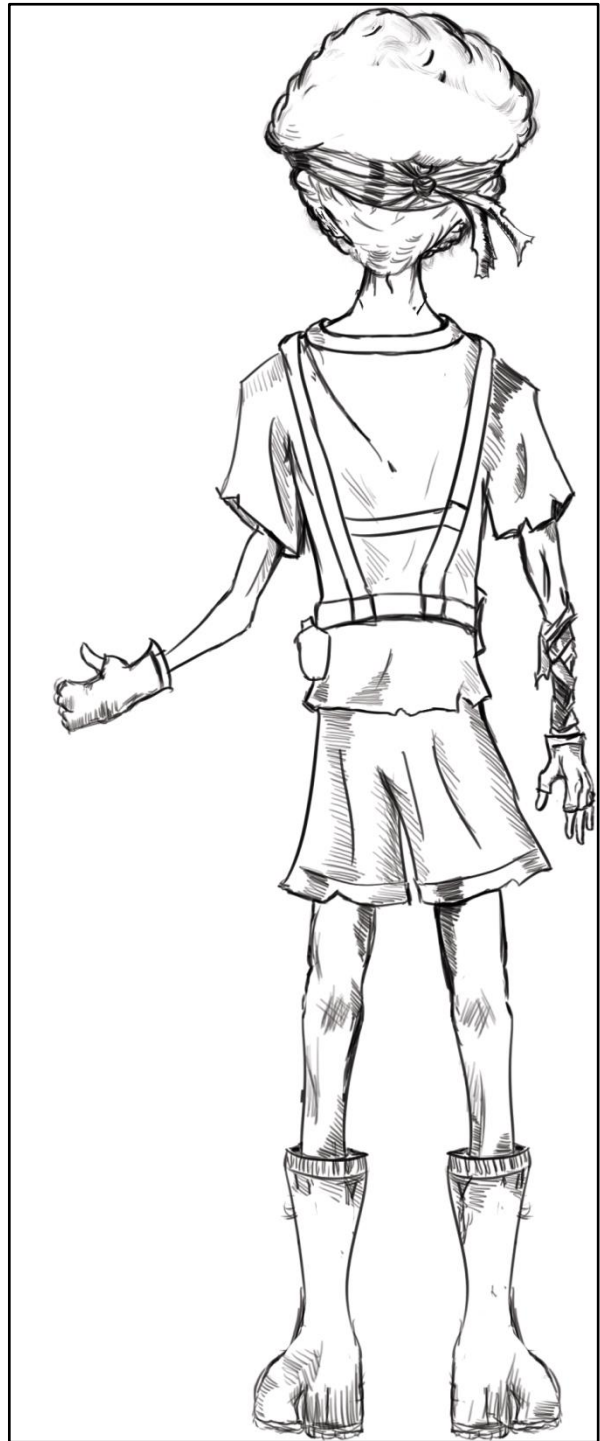
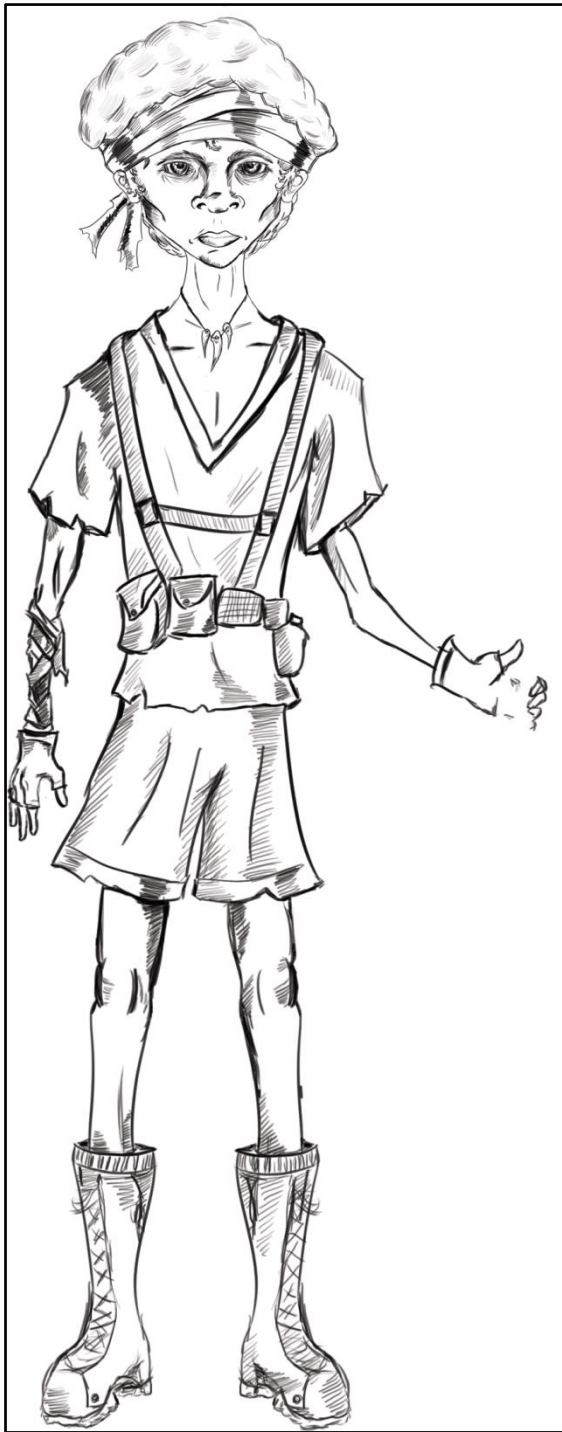


Image 46: Black Mamba front and backside final outlines
(With recreated face).



Image 47: Black Mamba's face digital drawing process

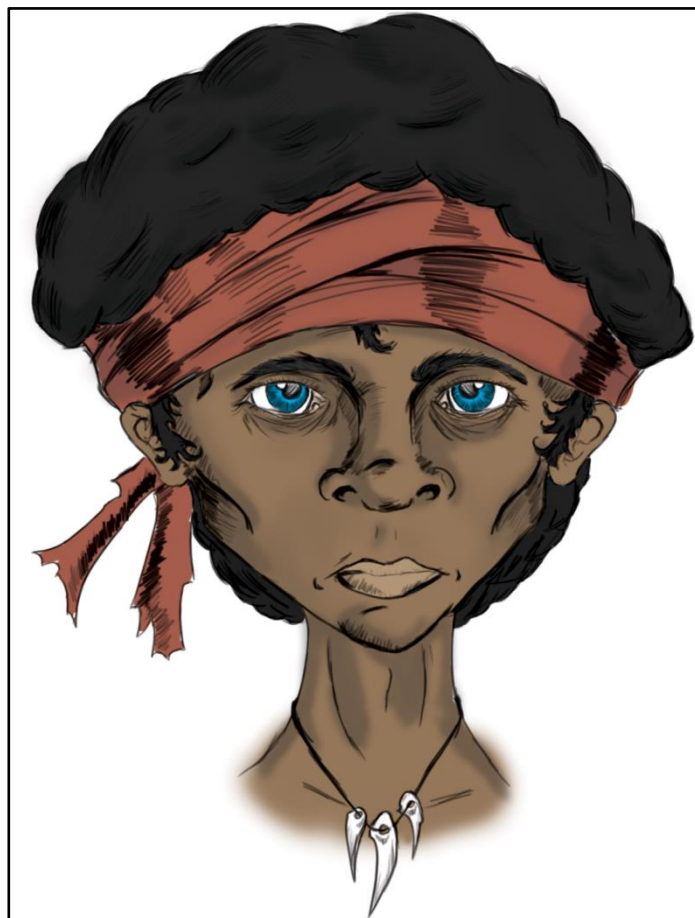
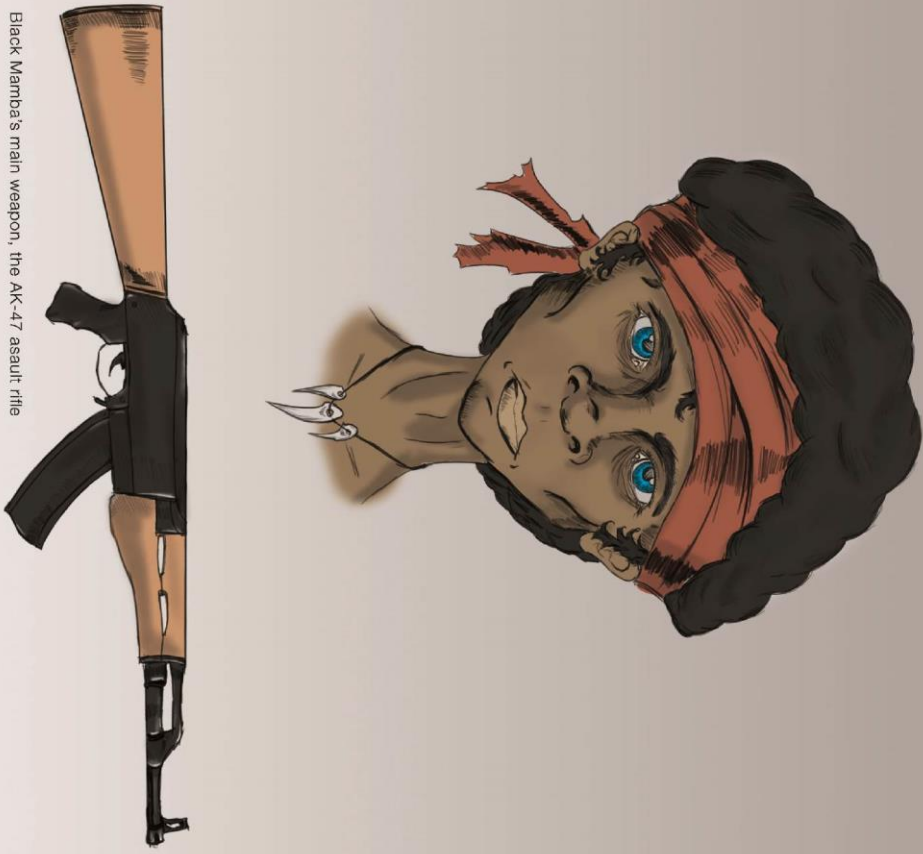


Image 48: Black Mamba's face final digital drawing



Black Mamba's main weapon, the AK-47 assault rifle

Biography:

Child soldiers are abundant in Africa, they are children or teens taken at a young age, trained to be stone cold killers. The Black Mamba is one of this child soldiers. The terrorist group that he belonged to got eradicated, and he and the other children that served under them were left on their own. The other children look up to him to lead them.

References

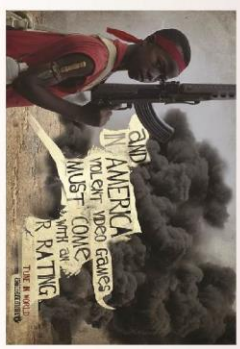


Image 49: Final character presentation sheet.

4.1.5 Inquisitor

Name: Inquisitor

Age: 52

Gender: Female

Backstory:

The Inquisitor was once a witch hunter herself. After her child, and her husband were brutally murdered by vampires she became a witch hunter to hunt down the unholy beasts. Now after years of hunting she has become exalted amongst the order and has risen to the rank of Inquisitor. She leads the witch hunters in their holy crusade against the armies of darkness.



Image 50: Inquisitor final form – Front view

Analysis:

For my final character I wanted to design a woman, but not just any woman. I wanted her to look tough and wise, she would be old in age but not too old. I also wanted her to be in the role of a leader. At first I thought about making another warrior just like Elizabeth my first character. But in the concept process with the help of an expert, I decided to promote her in the role of a general or commander. So I dressed her appropriately, by giving her a reddish coat resembling that of an admiral's to wear on her shoulders. Her eyes would look serious and determined, and her facial details would give away her older age.

Sketches and Early Drawings



Image 51: Early sketch of The Inquisitor

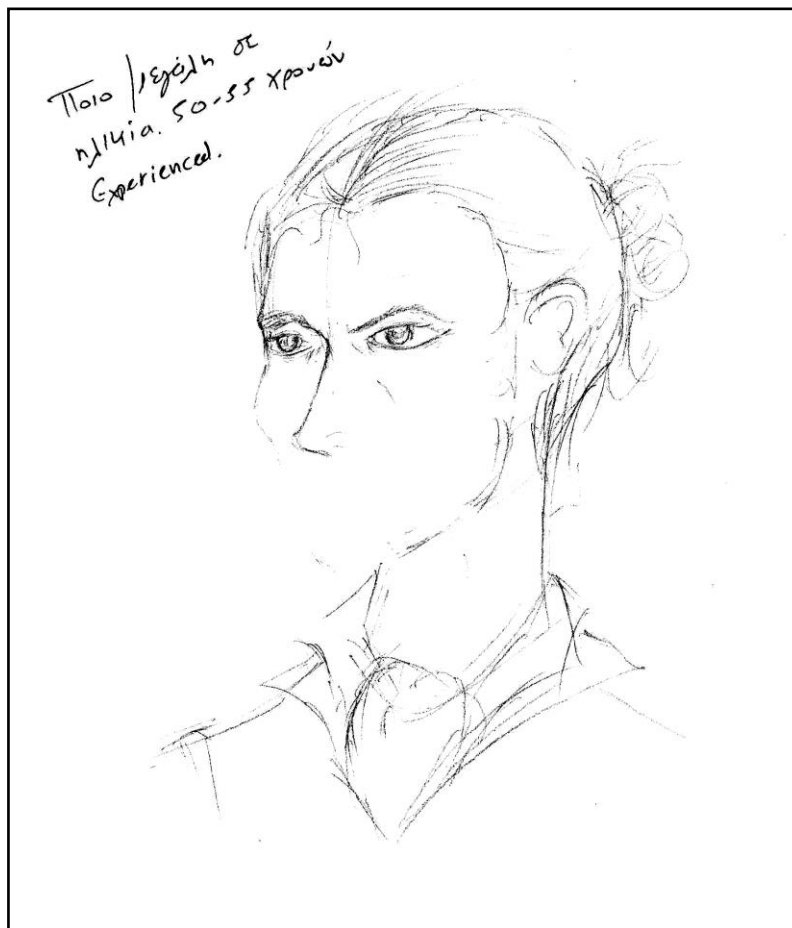


Image 52: Early sketch of The Inquisitor

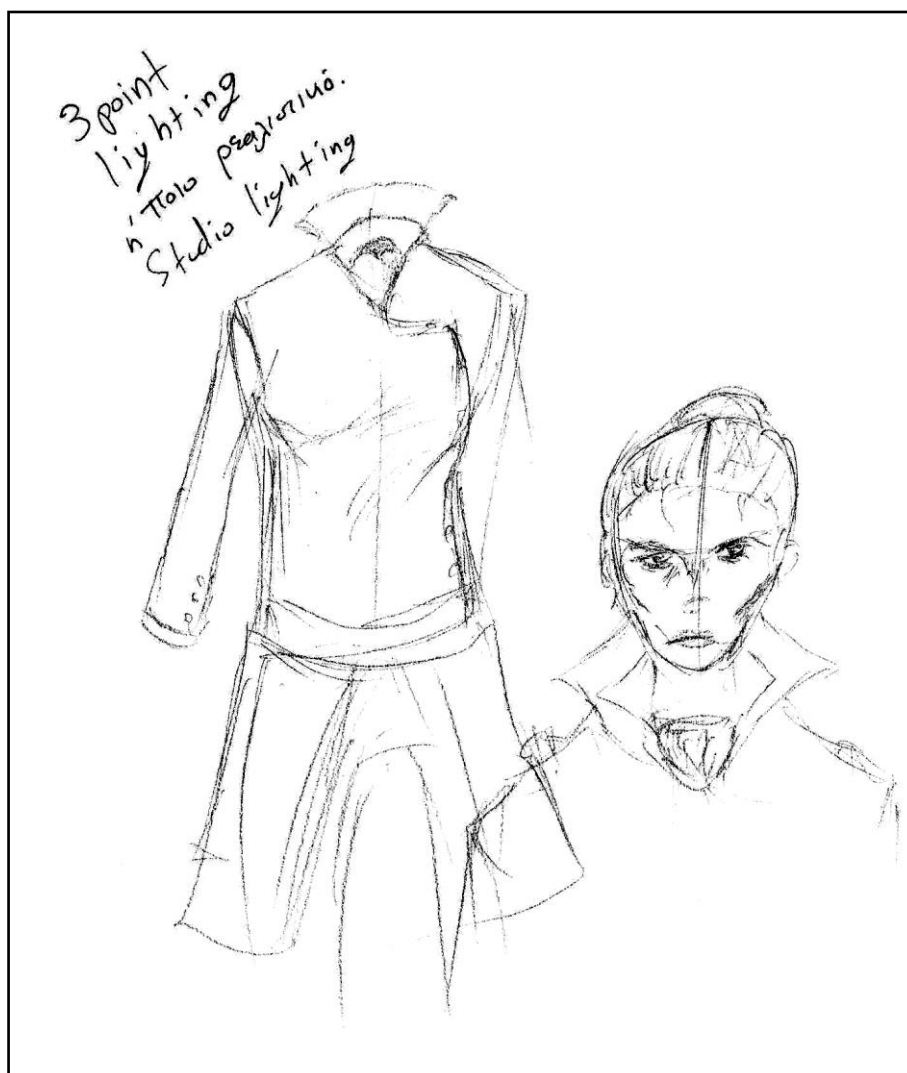


Image 53: Early sketches of The Inquisitor and her attire

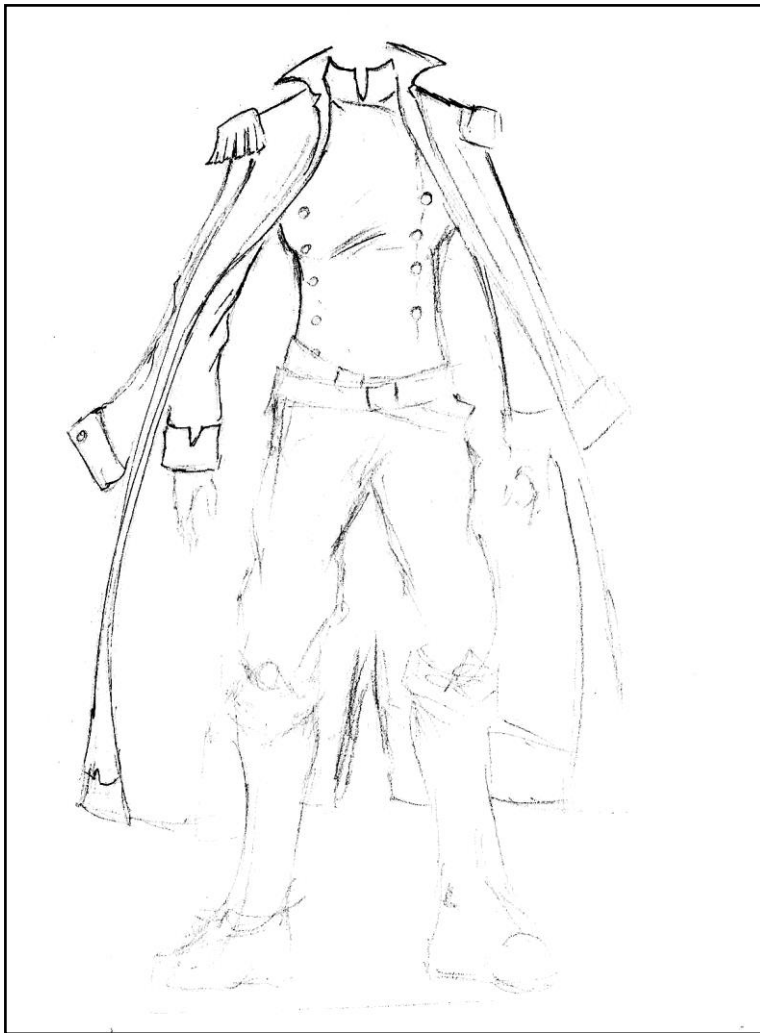


Image 54: Sketching of Inquisitor's body, that would become her final outline

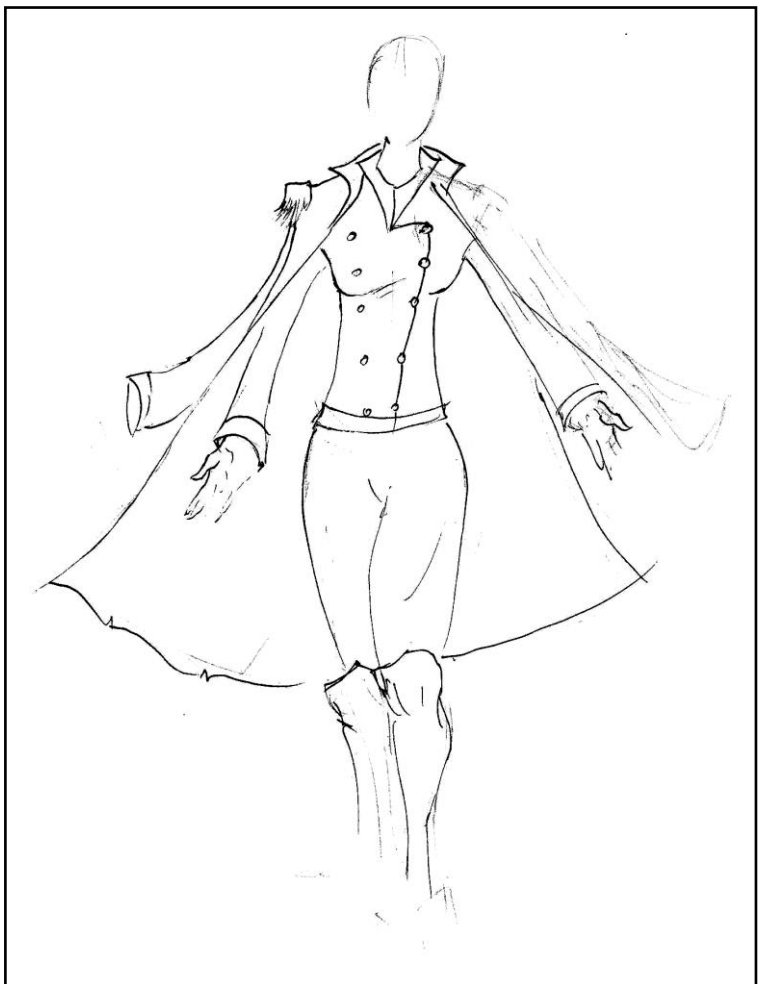


Image 55: Sketching idea for her body.

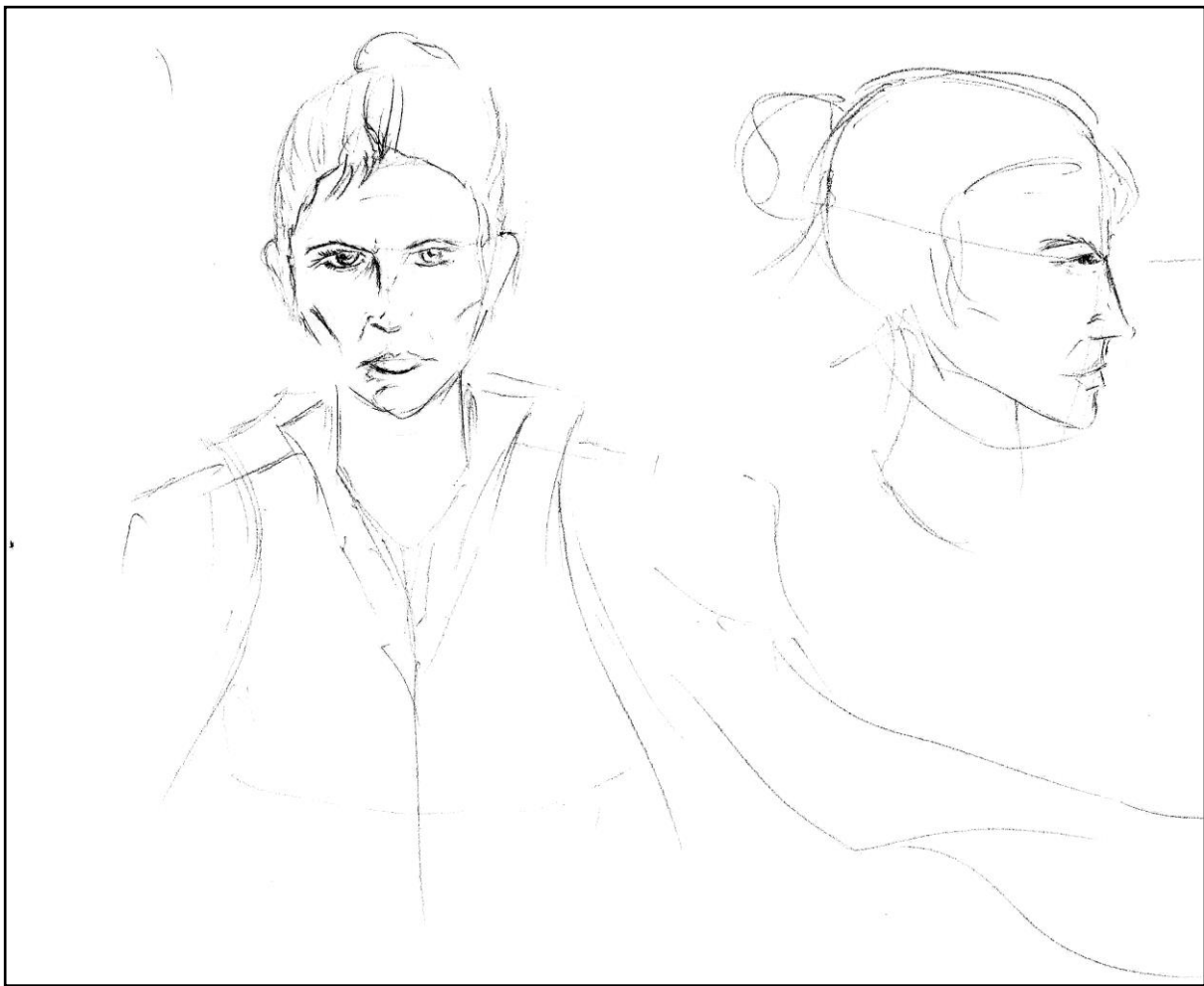


Image 56: Face sketches of The Inquisitor

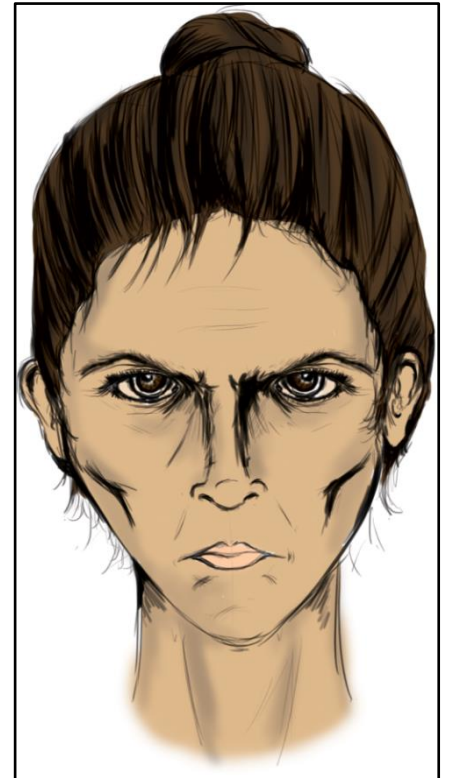


Image 57: From left to right: First form of inquisitors face (The analogies were wrong, her eyes were too close with each other), Final form of inquisitors face without color and shadows, Final digital drawing of her Face



Stake
A crude weapon
but useful in the
hunt for vampires



Biography:

The Inquisitor was once a witch hunter herself. After her child, and her husband were brutally murdered by vampires she became a witch hunter to hunt down the unholy beasts. Now after years of hunting she has become exalted amongst the order and has risen to the rank of Inquisitor. She leads the witch hunters in their holy crusader against the armies of darkness.



References

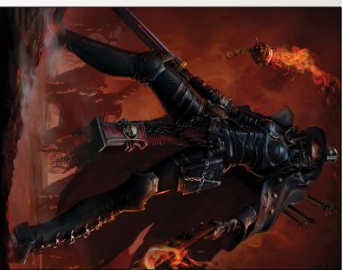


Image 58: Final character presentation sheet.

4.2 Interviews with Experts and feedback:

To seek guidance and receive feedback for my work, I interviewed an expert in character design. These are the phases from start to finish of the Thesis' design cycle.

4.2.1 Phase 1

Project Description

Firstly I described the project to the expert and what my objective is and received the following feedback, tips and guidelines which will be presented in bullet points, some are the expert's quotes:

- “We must understand when we do a specific design and why”. For example I need to know when and why I portray a character in a not sexist way, so I can portray him or her in the best way possible.
- I should create a character without sexist stereotypes, but I should not forget to make him or her attractive at the same time. Because the character is still part of a supposed game, and the game still needs to sell.
- Research other Artists and how they work and what design choices they make. And at the same time figuring the style that I need to work with.
- Find references for my characters. Nothing in the world is 100% anymore, everything is less or more copied from something else. So draw reference from other existing characters, and make my own original ones.
- Uncanny Valley theory. In short I need to make a character as realistic as possible and not sexist but at the same time I need to make them attractive in a design way. So I should be careful not to make them too dull in my attempt to make them with non-sexist stereotypes in mind, but I should be also careful not to make them sexist in an attempt to make them interesting and attractive, in conclusion; find a happy medium between attractive and avoiding stereotypes.
- “We want the characters to represent real life values, even though they are in a fantasy setting”
- “What does the body type of the character has to do with their clothes? And how can you use their body type, in order to make the “player” attracted to the game, without of course delving into sexual stereotypes”

- “The character’s clothes and general appearance are conditioned from their backstory” In conclusion, create a backstory for each character first and then start designing.
- The characters should be presented in character sheets. Just like how they are presented in animation studios or video game studios. Front and backside of the character, along with some props, a close up of the character’s face, their backstory and the references used to create the character.

Rough Outlines

After receiving tips about character design in general, I showed the expert my early sketches of my characters, and received some further feedback about them:

Elizabeth

- She doesn’t look like a woman. Her clothes do not give out sexist stereotypes, but she does not look like a woman, at all (see image 12).
- “Thin her waist a little. She is a doctor with an athletic figure. She doesn’t need to look like a bodybuilder or look too sexy, she just needs to have some athletic figure” (see image 12)
- She must not have big breasts, physics prevent her from fighting if she has big breasts.
- Make her have a belt, so her waist can be shown and the same time she will look more like a woman. In order to show her waist she needs to be changed from her first form (see img.12) to more like her final form (see image 14).

Revenant

- Overall looks all right but needs more details (see image 18, image 19, image 20)
- Add spikes to its backside. The spikes could be the bones on its spine.
- Look up references from other skeletons in games and real life
- Look at the human body’s anatomy.

The Master

- His legs are too short. His feet are supposed to be further down from where they are now (see image 33).
- His hand is too small and looks weird (see image 33).
- His shoulders are too big, they should be aligned with his knees. (see image 33).

Black Mamba

- Research how a child's anatomy works.
- He looks too old here (see image 41).
- His gun is huge in comparison with the character (see image 42).

Inquisitor

- She looks older than what she is supposed to be (see image 51)
- Emphasize the features of her face
- Do not make her hair blonde. Make them brown, it helps with the design and it also makes her seem wiser.
- Draw reference from the woman in the Van Helsing Movie.
- Give her some accessories to wear like a scarf in on her arm. So she can look more experienced.
- Her clothing should be identical with her inner world. If she is a serious character, she needs to look serious and wear serious clothes.

4.2.2 Phase 2

Final Outlines

In the second meeting with the expert, I showed him the final outlines of my characters.

Below are the feedback I received about them:

Elizabeth

- Improved from the last design choice.
- The open coat helps her look more like a woman (see image 14).
- Looks a bit like a pirate, but that's ok (see image 14).
- For coloring, try dark colors. For the coat dark blue, for her hat black, for her mask light brown.
- For shading, use cell shading, similar to that of manga and anime style shading.
- Add a few props in the presentation alongside her.

Revenant

- The knees are too fat (see image 27).
- The thighs are too thin (see image 27).
- Use Cell Shading instead of rough lines (see image 21, image 27).

The Master

- His legs are now too long. Rearrange his legs, maybe move them up (see image 34).
- The crotch area is too low, it needs to be moved upwards (see image 34).
- The knees are also too low, they need to be moved up (see image 34).

Black Mamba

- Legs too small and too short (see image 43).

Inquisitor

- The face needs more work (see image 56).
- Her breasts are too low, they need to be moved up (see image 54).
- The analogies of her face are wrong (see image 56, image 57).

I was now ready to continue digitally and adding more color and shadows.

4.2.3 Phase 3

Rough Digitals, Base Color and shading

In this phase I worked entirely digitally on my characters and I added color to some of them in addition to shades. This is the feedback for phase 3:

Elizabeth

- Add more details to her clothes, and hat.
- Smoother shades. Especially on the mask.
- Lighter colors, try raising the lightness by creating an adjustment layer (The colors in print were too dark).
- Add some blue color in the syringe, for color variation (Prop in the presentation) (see image 16).
- Make a close up of her face, next to the figures for the presentation.

Revenant

- Just add a close up view of the face
- Add props for the presentation. Do not bother creating new items, use existing items, like the armor (see image 26).

The Master

- His analogies are correct now.
- Change the colors, less yellow.
- Add a close up to his face, and some props for the presentation (see image 35, image 36)

Black Mamba

- Colors are too bright.
- Colors need adjusting, brightness/contrast (see image 44).
- Add close up of face and some props, maybe his weapon (see image 45).

Inquisitor

- Her eyes are too close with each other (see image 57).
- Her knees are too big (see image 54).
- Her feet/boots are too big (see image 54).
- Her legs need to be shortened a little (see image 54).
- Colors need adjustment, too bright or too red.

4.2.4 Phase 4

Final Drawings/ Presentation

In phase 4 my characters were at their final stage and ready to presented.

Feedback:

All in all the characters are well done, they do not portray any sexual stereotypes or any stereotypes at that matter. The characters are original and unique, maybe except two, “The Master” and “Revenant”, since similar but not the same characters have been seen before in games. If more time was available the following improvements would be needed:

- Photorealistic shading.
- More details for each character.
- More figures or sides for each character, side view and 3/4 view are missing.
- 3D modeling for all characters or at least one character.

5. Conclusion

The two research questions of my Thesis and how they were addressed.

Research Question 1:

“What is good character design and how is it done without stereotypes?”

Research Question 2:

“Other than the non-sexist design in characters what other designs can be used and what other concepts and features can be promoted?”

I addressed the first research question by researching good and bad design choices, such as characters in other games with sexist stereotypes and characters with no stereotypes, and then I designed five original characters by drawing reference from the good design choices that were made on other characters and avoiding any sexist stereotypes at the same time.

The second research quest was addressed by introducing unique or unusual concepts to my characters, such as an elderly man, a young child and a “neutral” skeleton character as main characters in a supposed video game, in an attempt to promote minorities(the elderly, children) in video games.

5.1 General Conclusions

Researching video games and Iraklis Ioannou’s Thesis, it is clear that sexist stereotypes exist in video games, and through good design these problems can be solved. To prove that, I’ve managed to successfully design five original characters that are meant for video games without any stereotypes, especially sexist ones. With research, careful character analysis and an expert’s evaluation my characters have been deemed worthy to be presented in a game, and are indeed designed without any stereotypes but also promote originality, uniqueness and also promote minorities (In video games), such as the elderly, children and races that are not portrayed in video games that often.

5.2 Limitations

The Thesis was completed, but some limitations were encountered throughout the project’s duration. One of the biggest limitation was time, if more time was available, the characters

could have been done better aesthetically, more figures with more views could have been created, the characters could have been rendered in 3D and even more characters could have been designed. Another limitation was the lack of experts in the field. Only one expert was found in the field of character design.

5.3 Future Directions

As stated above if more time was available the characters could have been rendered in 3D. Full body 3D models could be made for each character, and afterwards they could be printed with a 3D printer, and having statues for each character. And even maybe program a video game demo with these characters in it, to see how they would look and act in a video game with sounds and voices even. Furthermore the evaluation of my characters could be expanded and use Iraklis Ioannou's content analysis coding scheme to understand if my characters are indeed free of stereotypes.

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